

# RENEE GLADMAN HOUSES OF RAVICKA

"Renee Gladman has always struck me as being a dreamer—  
she writes that way and the dreaming seems to construct the  
architecture of the world unfolding before our reading eyes."

EILEEN MYLES



MAN

# HOUSES OF RAVICKA

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# HOUSES OF RAVICKA

## RENEE GLADMAN

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PART ONE: THE COMPTROLLER

No . 96

I wandered through the Skülburg with my shades on—exactly as I'd done the previous day—only now with Triti's compass. My mission to locate and reconfigure spatial logistics for two houses that exist on the same parallel geoscog referential—even though physically they stand two districts apart—was becoming ever-more mysterious. No. 96 in the Skülburg concerned no. 32 in cit Mohaly; I had the precise calculations. But the landscape wasn't responding properly. Triti's compass, I was convinced, was to help me succeed where the day before I'd failed: isolating the northwest side of Lejocz Street where no. 96 purportedly lay. On my first attempt, I couldn't find it. The thing about numbers is that they aren't supposed to be arbitrary: a number is given to a

thing so that it can function within a system of ascension or its converse, whereby any number could tell you how approximate you were to any other number. However, there was no propinquity on this street, no number 96 in sight. I returned home that evening in defeat. Staring at my calculations, I couldn't explain it. No. 96 was at a longitude in direct line with the Yvr monument, which sits at the head of the boulevard I visited that day. No. 96 was—I counted—one, two . . . nine houses to the northwest. Precisely where I'd gone. The ninth house, northwest on the eightieth diagonal, degree nth. It wasn't no. 96. It was nothing. Not even a lot. What was it? How would you describe it? It was . . . whatever you call "turning the corner" as a place. "I understand what you're saying," Triti had reassured me that night. "Did you check for lapsed anomalies?" I explained that I'd broken the propositions down to their logical units and rebuilt them using Kovacs' theory and drew the same conclusion: house no. 96 was house no. 32 in the most intimate sense. "Then you need my compass." I slept fitfully that night. In the morning, I was to stop by her house to pick up her compass before venturing into the city again. She lived in the hills above downtown, in cit Ramtala. I hold

the administrative position that had been Triti's three years ago. I couldn't ask her to accompany me. I was the Comptroller for our district; to not find houses on my own would mean I could not meet the responsibilities of the job. They assigned me to complete the maps, which meant first I had to recalculate the seismic mo-fixtures, and then throw out a Scrog-8 screen of the entire city-country of Ravicka. I knew the functions had everything to do with no. 32 but, because one could not inhabit that space physically, I had to go to its mate, no. 96. I would borrow Triti's compass just for one day. It wasn't a breach. I was being strategic, because if I couldn't find no. 96 where I had calculated it to be, then how could I know I'd actually found the site where no. 32 wasn't? I was recalling this and following the compass and drawing a reverse hybrid-8 in my mind and that's how I ended up facing the river, the Skülburg off to my right. Not enough houses to make what I'd found a neighborhood, but enough to present me with a choice: do I go to the house on the left end of the bank or the right? There were only three hours of sunlight and plenty to accomplish once I arrived at my destination. Before anything else, I'd have to devote a significant amount of time to sketching

the site. In order to obtain to sketching, I'd have to find a place that was private. It was important that a Comptroller not be disturbed when she was doing such things, as input from others could jeopardize the precision of the forms. I needed to do something definitive soon. The fact that I had Triti's compass in my possession meant that I had already humbled myself, I had already risked the reputation of the Comptroller's Office, so it would be only to lose a tiny bit more if I ventured to one of these houses on the bank and asked for help. There was one stipulation: I had to turn my coat inside out to do this, as I could not reveal my status. I walked toward the shack to my right; my stripes were facing inward. Calling upon a dilapidated home requires a different degree of *pareis* than you would use for a more prosperous one. You have to take into account the probable sense of isolation felt by the inhabitants of the house. Act as though "passing the marsh": not shouting, as one would normally, nor caving in at the chest. You have to speak soberly, but with hope and awe surrounding you.

He wasn't poor, the old man who answered. I could tell right away, and he knew me, we came to find, which

deepened my embarrassment, having approached the house with so much pity. "Ridiculous," he called out to me. "Who sent you here? And what's wrong with your clothes?" Not Ravickian. We'd never speak to each other this way. Basharac, no doubt. Living in a shack. Pretending something. I nodded the way one has to nod with a Basharac and walked inside. Not rich either: it was a middle life. The man's name was Duder K. Munhandyi. "Well, get in then," he said, when he found me sitting at his welcome table, again playing something off. My Comptroller's hat was turning. "You'd do well to face up to that jacket, Duder Jakobi," he said. He had an advantage over me. Not only did he know my name without my having presented it (as was custom) but also he seemed to grasp my attempt at deception. It was annoying: I wanted to contrive a reason to fine him. His clothes were stupidly mediocre; the shack was nicer on the inside than the outside, but I could find no violation in either. He was running an operation—that much I knew—but did I have time to get to the bottom of it? Not with no. 96 waiting in the distance. The Basharac were always asking Ravickians for their ID, should I do the same to him? That would definitely cause an escala-



tion. "Drink your tea," he demanded. My ticket book was howling. I stood up. I held my tongue. "Drink your tea, Duder Jakobi." "Drink, drink, and sit down." This man was a patient who needed to be returned some place. He'd probably never been given a chance. Is that what he wanted? It took all my afternoon strength, plus knocking against his table, to say no. No, I wouldn't drink it and I wouldn't sit and the day was falling and we were nowhere and many other things until I found myself on the right side of the door, closing it roughly to my face, he pawing at it. Of course, he wanted to open the door and win me back, but I held it to. He wasn't strong enough. It would not open. He was raging inside, but I was strong. I held the door. I lost time. An hour had to go by before he relented, which then, I believe, led to sleep.

Triti wasn't sympathetic to my plight: had I her compass I wouldn't have strayed so far from my intended

site and met that "unfortunate man"; yet I did have her compass. "It was that disgusting," she practiced her English. We all said this now. To punctuate anything. All emotion, for a time, seemed to lead to the same expression. "That disgusting," she murmured. Triti struggles with imperfection and that's why she was our best Comptroller. But when you leave a job you've got to let it go, take interest in new clothes. Plus, many things in Comptrolling have changed. We don't use the yellow caution tape anymore. We sometimes do a bit of plumbing. Sometimes, as a present-day Comptroller, we are forced to improvise with the book of regulations, as city dynamics change much faster than the narratives that monitor them. You have to configure quickly. You have to be capable of looking inside anything. I monitor ciut centali (downtown), as well as the dense areas just to the north of it—cit Mohaly, cit Sahaly, Sjandzyczburg and cit Ramtala. "Then, why can't you find it?" Triti lashes out. No. 32, I found easily. It wasn't there. But no. 96, which is there, and should have been easy to stamp, was nowhere in sight. Yet, the two are in a fixed coordination. Which means, you cannot have the one without the other, or conversely, not have the one without not-

having the other. So, something in my calculations was off and eluding me. No. 96 was out there, but perhaps at a negative slope to my previous configurations, eliding the mo-fixtures that made geoscography consistent. Triti is dying for me to ask her for assistance. She wants to tell me what to do. I can't believe it. The greediness of people, always coveting what someone else has, even though they themselves are very successful. Is she tired of this teashop she opened in her backyard? Triti, the brew is delightful today, I try to distract her inviolate greed. However, instead of joining me in congenial conversation, she drills, "Did you measure out the splint 4-7s?" When a person starts to speak to you in monotone, even if it's your dearest friend, you've got to get up and go. For just that day, you've got to bow and *gurentij* and go. Triti, *gurentij*, I praised then fled. What a day! All of the people who have tried to undermine me. I proclaimed through my exhaustion, though not loud enough for others to hear: I am head of the Office of the Comptroller for the city-country Ravicka. I wear the green stripes. I am the author of the book *Regulating the Book of Regulations*, which is referenced widely. And on and on I listed my feats, until horns and dimin-

ishing light forced me to concentrate on the evening traffic, crossing the main roads.

"Now look at here." It's late, but I have walked back to the river, to Duder M.'s house, and knocked on his door. He looks cracked, as though I've awakened him from sleep, but also, self-satisfied, like he'd been expecting me. "Now . . . look . . . at . . . here," he draws out, actually tapping his slipper to the floor, hands on his fragile hips. Again, I enter without his noticing. "Duder Wakozy, if you're here to pay me what you owe, you're gonna have to come back in the morning." It isn't my name, another game he's playing, I think, because he's still looking at my clothes. Saying one thing, meaning another, I start to reach inside my coat for my ticket book. But something brought me back here. I want to open up to him. I struggle to put my feelings into words, but he's not interested. Every time I get close, he insults me. "The cheap don't sleep," he says whenever there is silence. We

go on in this way, while outside the light changes. Now something new is happening. The onus is on me: when I've almost got him there, to the point at which he'll soften, right when I see his eyes begin to water and a small tremble antagonize his mouth—his face twitches as if beginning to line up sincere thoughts—I sabotage the dawning moment. We reverse our course, and suddenly it's he who's making suggestions. "Shall we go out for a walk?" he asks. At this time of day? I exclaim. "It's plenty time," he answers.

You notice the weather, the gradations in the road, the places where the lighting is poor, when there is an old man on your arm. You sweat, and in your mind curse and count backward when the old man's a Basharac, whom you can't push down a steep hill, who doesn't hold your nation captive anymore. "We are among friends," Ravickians have been trying to convince themselves for the last two decades. Impossible. To counter my bad judgment (of not returning home after my visit to Triti's) I try to get some work done. Let's take a walk through the Skülburg, I suggest. Duder M. gives me a strange look. "What are you up to young man?"

Then I see he's thinking about it. "You know you won't find what you're looking for." The Basharac are very discouraging as a people. But, in the end, he decides to continue on with me, though not without some spatial demands: I must stay a certain number of feet ahead of him and signal with my left hand before I turn my head to contribute to our otherwise friendly conversation. When we cross the bridge into the Skülburg I start to search for no. 96, using covert techniques. The streets are deserted. An occasional bicyclist shoots by in paranoid fashion; there are one or two semi-trucks. But in general, lights are off and even Ravicka's few partygoers have retreated for the night. Lejocz is not an elusive street; it's modest. It does not move. Finding it was easy. Even the deep night gave it an air of innocence, of being democratically open to everyone. You could not have been more "every" than Duder M. and myself were, walking its winding way. I stuck my breasts out. I am your Comptroller, I recalled inwardly. Lejocz, in a sense, parted for us. The sleeping houses gleamed. Eighty-eight . . . ninety . . . ninety-two—I counted on one side of the street—while Duder M. shouted, rather insanely, ninety-one . . . ninety-three . . . ninety-five on

the other. We were approaching no. 96, I knew. I felt it so plainly I almost suggested we turn around. We didn't need to find it if it was going to be there, I thought momentarily. Then I imagined how Triti would respond to such a rationale and continued toward my destination. But, there it wasn't, again. You cannot imagine the heat that attacked my face, neck, and arms. I stood in that non-existing place, with Duder M. studying me, still on the odd side of the street, wringing my hands. "So you see . . ." he started slowly.

I left him there. It could not have felt good to him at the time. And, had his mouth been free, he probably would have yelled out my name as I walked the length of Lejocz's Street. But I had anticipated that and handicapped him against embarrassing me. I needed to sleep; it was difficult to admit to myself the degree of my discouragement. I reassured myself: just because I couldn't find no. 96 in the middle of the night with

an eighty-year-old Basharac does not *have* to mean I would never find it. But soon, I knew, I would have to move on to other projects. There are tens of such anomalies. This one though . . . what was I missing? I had been awake too long to figure it out. I regretted that I'd knocked Duder Munhandy's hat off, such that it fell into a bit of sludge. But there was nothing I could do about the hat now. Instead, I forced myself to walk the way people do when they might as well be running, considering the violent swing of their hips; it was the closest thing to self-flagellation I could think of, with my mind so bleary from lack of sleep. I arrived home and had two drinks.

"Wake it up." Someone dear was shaking me. "How can you be our Comptroller and behave like this?" I knew it would happen. Her voice was high-pitched; she couldn't stand it anymore. "If you don't get up, I'm going to go out and place the geoscrog for no. 96 myself." I couldn't

lift my head. I'd had such a long night. "I know I can find it." She was beside herself. "You should have asked me from the start." But Triti, what about your tea shop? I managed to eke out. "Get up, Comptroller, now." She was yelling. I thought I was in a dream. I turned over to see. Nothing happened. I was right. Well, let me sleep. I thought I was back to sleep when something dropped onto my temple, rolled across my cheek, then into my mouth. It's Laughter's Lament. After several "sips" of Triti's specialty, I was awake, wearing the customary jacket and orange t-shirt.

The Skülburg looks different this morning. Its features of last night—how Duder M. and I encountered them—do not roll over for Triti and me. This kind of lapse precludes beginning where you left off, which is what one has to do as the city's Comptroller. It is unconscionable that each new day you must start again from zero. In the case of no. 96, I admit there has never been progress, unless one counts the verification of no. 32, which one can only half do at this point. Ah ha, I say every time we do something I have already done. We are essentially following my path of the previous

days. Triti is mumbling calculations under her breath, as if there are other things to work out besides what I've already established. I don't want it to be a competition. I'd like to think we were both working for the city: the city has a problem—a lack of geoscrog for a certain set of houses—and we (it's "we" now?) are here to resolve it. The Comptroller, and Little Former. I'm calling her "Little Former" now instead of Triti, which makes her mumble even louder. We've become a sight for the Skülburg regulars in their walking clubs. My ruler and her ruler; my plate-frag patometer and her plate-frag patometer. Identical, except for their editions. It's unheard of that you'd see two such instruments in tandem. We're walking the last column of calculations, on the same route I've been following for days; so I know in just a few minutes we're going to come upon the same conundrum: the place where no. 96 should be but isn't. She knows this too, so she's trying to run ahead of me. But I won't let her. I match her step as only a Comptroller can. The patometer hums against my chest. I look around at the day. It's early, so I'm not sure what the sun's going to do, but right now it's bright. I'm trying to feel good about many things. How a month ago, I was

honed by the city council. How a year ago, I'd learned to fish. I see Dr. Trajenigen across the street and pat and stamp acknowledgements. Triti has grown quiet, our patometers in sync. What's going to happen, Triti, if it's not there? That's what I'm thinking. I want to reach for her hand. My right hand is free, but she's on my left side. What am I reading? I try to recall my bedside table. Oh yes *The Days Were Done* by Gunnezet. Another two people I know. Hello to them. My chest is getting tight. We're about a block away. I wonder if she'll count down. It's hard. Hard to do this with a friend. Controlling is a solitary job. That's why people keep looking this way. Plus, Triti makes me look old. Here's no. 84. I recognize it. What will I do if no. 96 is there? Wouldn't that be the more damning scenario? I wish I were reading Amini right now. How *The Very Long Array* would fortify! But Gunnezet is the man of the hour. We can't have advanced more than two houses past no. 84, yet Triti stops abruptly, and yanks the frag off her patometer. She looks around, punches 2-something-something into the frag. It's formulating a response. I've got my frag at hand too, but I don't know what to calculate, because this isn't the eightieth diagonal on the nth bar. We

narrator  
of  
Book 2

are still at bar k. Yet the frag's reading excites her. She rushes out into the middle of the street, and holds up her hand to stop traffic. I couldn't begin to explain why. The cars don't know either. Everybody waits while this not-entirely-sprightful woman walks circles around a manhole covering, with her ruler hanging from a necklace, flapping against her backside. And suddenly, like that crowd of revelers you've been warned about finally reaching your block, she starts to yell, "I found it! I found it! Mark that geoscrog here." Absolutely not. Not in the time of day, not in the wake of night. This isn't the opera, I shout back. Just because you're yelling at the top of your lungs doesn't mean you're saying anything. She wants my roll of graph paper, but I refuse to unwrap it. This is for the geoscrog of no. 96, I remind her, not some pothole. I've got to get away from this scene. I take a step backward. In fury, she throws her arms around my neck. She's trying to reach my Comp-troller bag; it's an escalation, but it works out for me: I use the momentum to continue my way backward, toward the sidewalk. She doesn't notice. I've got her away enough that the cars resume moving. An angry honk, unwisely, calls her to attention. She disengages,

and looks stunned to find herself offsite. "What have you done?" She grabs my shirt and raises her ruler hand. Triti! Triti, I cry, What is the name of your new female tea? "What are you talking about?" She spits out. I have never seen her so angry. The one you discovered during your trip to the Hafahs. She doesn't want to answer, but she's obsessed with these leaves and their dirt. For a time, I don't know which way she'll go. She's still clenching me. But it isn't long before the blinking of the eyes starts. Everybody's been talking about it, I add to encourage her, Even the men over at Wader's. "The peckony? Is that what you mean?" If only she would let go of me. The very same, I say. What sort of body does it have? She's trying to fight off her interest, but is failing. "It's"—she doesn't want to say it—"delicate like a straw. In the style of Rusticairn." My shirt comes free. Triti's talking her usual fare: "I saddle it with ginger and a few pieces of rice. I roast the rice, because combined with the peckony the flavor is quite remarkable, a taste you can't reach without bringing forth the earthiness of the rice. But if you tried to roast the leaves themselves, this would destroy the rich ember plate running alongside the veins. The leaves fall upon the water, after the

rice is ready. You have to shake the rice vigorously." Oh, and getting the rice to the beverage state, I pursue, does it work something like this? I pull out my ticket book and use the reverse side to demonstrate what I mean. It takes an hour for her to explain the roasting process to me. When she's done, things are quite calm between us. A light rain falls over the Skülburg.

No. 32

I let a week go by before making any new calculations regarding no. 96. There were other duties I needed to perform as Ravicka's Comptroller, plus, it was good not to let things pile up. I tackled that B-list masterfully, but never let go completely my preoccupation with this dislocated house. Venturing into almost any city space puts you in the position of having to "face the facts" about Ravicka's structural problem—an excess of locations out of sync with their axiohexmetric origins, causing the city to rotate. The earth moves; there is nothing to be done about that. But the earth should not move in such constant advancement of the Comptroller that he cannot find the fugitive sites, that, more importantly, he cannot—using the irrefutable functionaries of geo-

scography—convince people that they are now where they were not. How many outings have amassed?

When I returned to the question of no. 96, I admit there was some residual embarrassment to work through. That fracas with Triti was unfortunate; it did not go unreported. I, perhaps, have not mentioned that I am occasionally supervised. It was difficult to explain to Dis Jiriska how her former Comptroller and her current (certainly more suited) one found themselves in a tug of war first thing in the morning, when the streets were full of people. The fact that Triti did not have to face this questioning—being "former" and now again devoted to her teashop—kept me angry for days. I did not drink with her. She called for me, and I did not come. I carried on in this way for as long as I could, then I grew lonely. I tried to socialize with other people. I even returned to the Basharac, who actually appeared glad to see me. But, he and I couldn't get far in our association: he's hard of hearing and is a belligerent pain in the ass.



I had gone to see Duder Munhandyi to silence the conversation I'd been having with him in my head. The approach was the same as before. "Well, come in, young man," which I had already done. "You look awful." I think it's just that he's not used to people. Other than apparently irritating visits from me, he spends his days alone. "So!" he says too loudly, "What happened with your building?" I don't have to answer. I am your Comptroller, I thought to myself. I didn't want to fight him. I did, though, want to discuss my future plans. Duder M. had an engineering background, I had come to learn. I needed to access it, but preferred doing so without his knowing.

Houses are a strange thing, I started. "You better believe it," he cut in. When you are the Comptroller, I continued, you have to think a lot about houses, where they should go, and the ones that are already where they are, you have to think whether that is where they should remain. I risked looking into his eyes. They weren't exactly popping. Maybe houses weren't his expertise. Houses are the height of calculatory inference, I boasted. "No sir, they are not. You are wrong

about that," he returned. I waited for him to continue, watched him lean back and move his eyes around the room. "I am looking for my calculator," he shouted. "Goddammit. Where is it?" He looked around, frantically. "I've checked everywhere!" But, he hadn't moved and the glasses he'd just now attached to his face were webbed with cracks. Perhaps if you moved closer to the shelves with your body? I suggested with diplomacy. We were in the center of a fairly large room, his books and desk lining the sides. "Move this body?" he demanded vehemently. I was kicked out. I didn't go. I stayed. I counted to twenty-seven, loud enough for him to hear me, but distantly. I wanted him to sleep. He did. For over an hour. It was inconvenient to my plans, but I needed something from him. Not only a sense of how one goes about constructing a Bjorjacs model for structural rivet systems—I needed to see no. 96, if only in abstract—but also, and this is harder to confess, to feel somewhere in the cracks of his behavior human love, directed toward me. That was the drawback of giving Triti the silent treatment: I hadn't felt any waves of emotion in over a week.

When Duder M. awoke, he was in a better mood. He wanted to know what I'd done while he was asleep. It was a perfect opening. How strange they are, I began mysteriously. "And what are we talking about," he responded, almost jovially. Houses, I said with a big sigh, as if the notion were uncontainable. "Houses," he commiserated with me.

How do I do this? I needed to get him to talk about what was still a mystery to me. I could not slip the word in, because I simply did not know it. Houses, I said to stall things. He cooperated in the sense that he repeated the word after me, and seemed committed to go on saying, "Houses," as long as I said it.

They really take up space. I put it out there. I ran my hand across the fabric of the sofa. What else did I think about them? They— My mind was empty. This had never happened before. How could I not know more about houses than that they were called "houses" and took up space? Duder Munhandyi, as empathetic as he had just been, was beginning to lose interest. You can repeat a word only so many times; you can mur-

mur to yourself with your legs tightly crossed only to a point, then you are asked to leave. He did it the old-fashioned way, bending over waiting for the door to close, which made my departure more hurried. In this case, I couldn't refuse to go. I worried about his back; his hips trembled, which I worried might bring on incontinence. All in all, I wished him well. I couldn't go on standing there.

The great novelist, where was she? Would she know anything?

I began a slow despondent walk toward the center of the city. It was time for lunch. I could name this day, "Finding Amini," but did I want to go that way? Wouldn't it be better to remain top of my game—the city's Comptroller, utterly? It was that disgusting, I thought, crossing the river. The place where the city's employees go for lunch is my least favorite place of any

and all places. To begin with, it is not really a place. It is a tent. You even have to unzip a wall to enter. Why should a Comptroller have to do that? In fact, it is not clear why I eat with employees rather than the city's officials, seeing as that's what I am. It's written into the stripes of my jacket. But, I'm an empath, practically! I go where I am most needed.

The past days had been hard. Triti waited in the wings. I knew I was on the long walk back to her, a slow, multi-bodied walk. But, before I returned, I need to discover something first. It could have been anything; it needed not pertain to my lost house. In fact, establishing a relationship with no. 32 seemed more productive at this point. I had already found it open to me. That is, not there as it should not have been. Things that are appropriately absent leave traces too. I would go there, make measurements. Then return to her. I wouldn't want to talk about what went on between us, not unless she begged my forgiveness, which would only happen were we on the precipice of a catastrophe and she needed something from me, for example, if I held the only flashlight in the whole city and the whole world

was submerged in darkness. She would ask to use mine, and I would say, Not unless you apologize. This is not likely to happen, so we had better get on with it. Remember the love, I was thinking, as I walked past Ludic Cathedral.

But there was that hunger; it followed me. The buildings alleviated nothing. What-I wanted was to bypass the lunchtime crowds, and head north toward cit Mohaly, where no. 32 was (not) located. If I didn't eat though, I might fall over in the street, which unfortunately happens from time to time. Comptrolling does not always allow for strict conscientiousness with regard to daily function, outside that of the job, and now seems to be threatening what lies inside the job, though even to think this makes me extremely uncomfortable. The job can't make the job impossible. What would happen to our days? I decided to stop and eat. I wouldn't let them annoy me.

—Our dear Controller!

They do this, knowing I am repulsed by the bastardization of my title.

-Our dear Controller! Please, come sit with us.

It was Boris Borinsky and Jadawl Mantaba, sitting at their customary table. I sat with them with deep resignation and ordered a lamb chop with frickers. You try to change the flow of things, but they always seem to go the same way. You entered and there were Borinsky and Mantaba, as if they knew you were coming in today, yelling your name so you had no choice but to join them, unless you wanted to do a back flip of regret, which I hadn't been able to muster since I was young. I'm an old man now, though upright and modestly tender. Not old, but in my early forties. Old.

My lamb chop arrived and I ate it with élan. I didn't want to draw attention to the conundrum that had befallen me.

-What is happening to the roads, Jakobi?

That was not my job. But you couldn't tell them this.

-Also, Jakobi, the lights on my street are out.

-And, people are saying the water is no good. Is Dranheim contaminated?

And it went on for half an hour. The meat was too tender to walk away.

-Jakobi, here's another thing I've been meaning to ask you. What's going on with the houses of Ravicka?

This was Jadawl Mantaba. My mouth hung open. I filled it with a fricker. Mantaba works in transportation, what would he know about no. 96? I couldn't answer his question because I didn't want to give myself away, but what if he had something I needed. I didn't respond, but I did push toward him a pad of paper. Most of it was full of drawings, axiohexmetric projections. He received the pad with equal solemnity, and began writing. I couldn't bring myself to look at Borinsky. He would be confused; he would say something loud.

This note Mantaba was writing was taking a long time; we were moving beyond the borders of the lunch hour, into a space I had never endured with them before. The dining hall was emptying, full of claps and yawns as people made their exit. Our table became a problem for the workers. They wanted to bus it; Boris invited them to, yet Jadawl sat so territorially over his doings that not enough of the table was free for clearing. He was a robust man. I heard laughter from the doorway. I think Boris was beginning to notice us,

what we were doing—Jadawl's scrawling, my waiting nervously.

—What is this?

There came Boris Borinsky. Our group had gotten rearranged: it now was Jadawl Mantaba and Jerzy Jakobi who were paired, and Boris Borinsky the figure on the outside. Someone zipped the shutters. We had to pay and leave. There was no other light source, and maps need light for fruition. Jadawl grabbed my arm then let it go. He grabbed it again. I had brought someone into the depths of my mystery without having to say a word. He wanted to go with me, but there was his work. Boris appeared stunned by our reorganization, yet he didn't seem to grasp that the change had to do with the map Jadawl was making. I think he suspected something else entirely. This would explain his embarrassment.

Jadawl Mantaba still held on to the pad I'd given him. I think the sketch was done but he didn't know what to do with it. I turned my palm over, so that it lay open and ready. It felt too overt. I closed the palm but at the same time that he'd laid the pad on top of it. The note-

book fell to the ground. The three of us stood over it in silence. I trembled inside my Comptroller's jacket. It would not be appropriate for me to throw myself at it. I spoke, finally:

—*Gurantij*, Jadawl Mantaba, Boris Borinsky. May you go off with yourselves.

And waited for them to leave. I bent forward in a bow and dropped my arm to the ground; let it hang there. I let loose a little gas, as was custom, which they accepted with synchronized clapping as they walked away. I was on my own again, with a new piece concerning my problem with the houses. I set new sights on Triti.

But before going to her, I wanted to return to no. 32, which sat on the third parallel intercostal to the degree forge in the neighborhood of Mohaly, and not far from where I stood. It was different to move through the day when you weren't beset by hunger. You could really swing your arms. I did that. I felt excited to make my approach, to cross the bridge into cit Mohaly. I was almost singing to myself, The Nothing, the nothing

that awaited me. I was amazed to find no obstacles as I moved through the streets, no bystanders making wise cracks, no movement specialists trying to climb on me. I went unimpeded.

When you decide to conduct a geoscog, everything you do from that moment on contributes to your result, and that's why the calculations must be impeccable. That is also why you must follow a prescribed route to your place of study. I could not walk down Hvarsaan to get to no. 32, though this would be the most efficient way, because I needed to follow the degree parallel, which was not Hvarsaan but Czorcic. From Czorcic, I would ascend the Fallender hill, then proceed through the square, which sits at the rear of the historical museum, upon which many years ago was added the "great mirror," and then take lefts on Walda and Ayerkradaja. The house, best understood as "no. 32," does not exist, appropriately. All the same, it is located on Bravashbinder Street.

#### CIT MOHALY

From Czorcic I was to ascend the Fallender hill, then proceed through the square, but due to the "miracle parade" taking place that day, I was forced to take a detour. Being thrown off my trajectory put the afternoon's project at risk. If I did not follow the correct parallel, I could not be certain where I'd end up. But the necessary degree was not available to me. People in felt clothing, carrying enormous brass instruments, clogged the thoroughway; the sidewalks were thick with their supporters. I tried to work my way through the crowd, but I was moving against the flow of the parade. I got thrown back out onto Czorcic. As I mentioned before, it was not possible to walk directly to the site; nothing would be there. And not the nothing

that should be there but something new and unintelligible.

Instead of taking a left on Walda, I exited the square at Timkin, a narrow residential street, and progressed until reaching Blvd. Feukel Mosca. From Feukel, I entered the pedestrian rotary. It was busy that afternoon. I was spit out of it several times before I could find traction. People don't behave well in rotaries; even those for walking. I missed my exit once and had to circle back for it; when I reached it the second time, an extended family was crossing in front of me, making my leaving the rotary impossible. I circled once again, but in the fast lane this time, and exited on my third try without difficulty. I was on Monstastrajen. I took a quick left; there was no street sign but the houses were bunched together like shadows. I took another left after 100 or so meters. I didn't believe the sign: it read Monstastrajen, but here a "court" instead of "place," yet it looked exactly like the first Monstastrajen. I recalled the same houses, the same colors of the houses. I stopped walking because the idea of circling, or much worse, succumbing to a labyrinth was disarming. I was tired of

regretting my decisions. I reasoned that as long as I didn't see the rotary I was not repeating myself. The detour had thrown me out of sync with these streets I've known most of my life. Well, you know the big streets, but sometimes forget these little ones. I got off Monstastrajen as soon as I could, but only to dead-end on Vibja. I checked the location of the sun; there was still time. I turned around. There was a fence there and on the other side a private road. I knew where that road led, a place I'd never go, even to save my life. A two-hundred-year-old barn that is a church that is a political center for the group of Bascharac that calls itself "Unity of Place." I turned harshly away from its trespassing signs and made my way back to Monstastrajen. Coming from this direction, I saw Bistra, which I had missed earlier. I turned right on Bistra. I took a quick left on Flvoder. I traveled along this road for a kilometer then turned left on Zablovski. I climbed a steep hill. I looked up at the sky. The sun was all right. I sat to rest. How far off was I from the degree nth? I reminded myself where I was going—no. 32, on Bravashbinder Street. I stood up. I needed to throw myself into this with full force. There was a street Alexandru Daigon

that ran parallel to Zablovschi, which seemed to connect to Turda, an avenue I knew to be closer to my destination than any of these previous streets, but it seemed a row of houses with large yards separated me from Alexandru. Where was the city? Where did all these houses come from? I had a choice: I could walk onto one of these properties, feeling fairly secure that they weren't churches or churches harboring politicians, or I could continue down Zablovschi until I reached Blvd. Petamakr and attempt to cross over there. A woman appeared at the front window of the house in front of which I stood with my ticket book, not to write a ticket but to work the numbers about where I was and where I needed to go. After a few moments, seeing that I wasn't moving, she walked out her front door. I pulled my jacket tight around me, so that there would be no doubt about my stripes. She got the message, made as if to check her mail, returned to her house. She was a short woman, with ropey hair hanging down her back. Oswai probably. I couldn't cross her yard in search of Alexandru Daigon, because our exchange had precluded any sort of *tij*. I continued down Zablovschi and took that left onto Blvd. Petamakr. It did not lead to Alexandru

Daigon but to Circului, another rotary. I turned and looked at the steep incline I'd just descended. Perhaps I would have to think of an alternate route from Turda, my third of the afternoon. I didn't want to climb that hill then have the sun set. I looked up at it. It hadn't been too long ago since I'd last checked, but I was hoping to stop by Triti's tonight. The sun was high in the sky, as it seemed to have been all day. The problem with Circului, though, was that, unlike Feukel Mosca, it did not cater to pedestrians. I could not simply enter it. I would have to hitch a ride at the entrance and be driven to my desired exit, which I wouldn't be able to identify until I saw it. I forgot the name of the avenue I wanted, but remembered the strange building that stood on one of its corners. I'd see it, and on the next go around jump out of the car with enough time to tumble into the grass surrounding the building before being plowed into by oncoming cars. No one would pick me up. I dusted off my jacket. People, it's your Comptroller, I shouted. Quietly. I looked up at the sun. It was all right, but I needed to hurry. I stood with my back to the cars and bent over (Triti would never have done this, but Triti also would have headed home hours ago). A man pulled



over. Fortunately, because it was a rotary, we had no time to talk. I asked him to drive until I found my strange building. I found it, but we needed to go around once more for me to get out. He wanted to begin a conversation as we rushed past the exits, but I waved my hand. Losing focus would throw off my timing. I leapt from the car. The building was still strange. I wondered about its geoscography as I stood there. It looked like it had an anomalous f-factor 2, but I would have to check the interior to know for sure. I understood somehow that I'd had that thought about the anomaly many times before. "I never return to this building" was a thought equally as strong. I move along Chelmska, the Mayor's street, but won't go as far as his house, which would put me too far south. I take the next left. I pass Shkodry, another left, but not the one for me: it dead-ends at the gates of the University. I take a left on Solec and walk studiously. I continue onto Vliska Pakr. I walk several blocks. I take in the air. It's been a nice day. Day, which makes me think of the sun. I look at it. It hangs there. I have time. Vliska is a long street with no intersections until finally I reach Ogrydjan. Have I taken enough lefts that now a right would do well for balance? I'm

trying to move in the direction of cit Ramtala, which has an easy footbridge into cit Mohaly. I take a left on Lutvris for good measure, then an immediate right onto Blvd. dij Sanje Tallon. I feel uncertain about the right so I go left once more on Kipsala. There is a park there. I look up at the sky. The sun is all right. Ayerkradaja, the street that intersects Bravashbinder, where no. 32 sits in spirit, begins at this park, but after a kilometer or so it gets cut off by the Balsha mountain. Were that mountain not there I could walk directly to my destination. It is good I had lamb for lunch, because it would have been hard to achieve all this walking on porridge and mustard greens, the alternative. To get around the mountain, I have to walk into cit Ramtala, climb its central hill, cut across the aeromart course, and cross the footbridge into cit Mohaly, where, at that point, I'd be on Mala Vas, two kilometers west of Ayerkradaja. Off the park I take Bajtova; it's a sedate street of town houses. I check their numbers. I don't know why. I think I'm afraid people will stop using the numerical system to establish order, that, all of a sudden, people will take it upon themselves to decide how their property should exist logically. They won't ask the Comp-

troller. They will remove their homes from recognition entirely. The houses move here, and every once in a while, people move their houses. It's that disgusting, I said out loud as I turned left on Trbeze. It does not take long before one starts to wonder why there are only rights and lefts. I try not to get paranoid. I say in a strained voice, I am turning left on Dolgi breg. Some club kids are walking by, dripping ink on the sidewalk. I don't have to say more, because of my jacket. They hurry along. I follow behind them—they're a gaggle. It's obscene. I take a right on Bicevje. Another right on Rjava. Another on Kekcevii. I take six rights, like suddenly I don't care where I'm going: I go Devova, Ulica, Mala trij, Pascal Lujbjuk, Meteor, and Pablo Picasso. I sit down on a bench. I'm afraid to look up. I've been walking for so long. Why did I take so many rights? I look up at the sky. The sun is all right. I hold my breath. Nothing happens. A woman walks by with a dog. She's wearing headphones. I'm the Comptroller, I shout at her. I get up. I'm tired. I notice that I'm a block away from the Fallen River river. I could take a boat back into the city, but I'd need to find a companion to share the transportation fee. I walk to the embankment and

stand in line. I am looking for a partner, I shout at the top of my voice. A woman steps out of line. She walks with a limp toward me. Two women on a boat, I ask her. "I can change if you want," she responds. I decline: she's exactly what I need. When we were buckled in I looked up at the sky. The sun hovered there; it was strong. I removed my jacket. This was the first time in a while. I could see, in my shirtsleeves, how much I'd been sweating. She turned her face so I wouldn't see her laugh. It was easy when you pranced around in a god-damn sundress, I thought to myself, although this woman was wearing slacks and she used her cuffs to salute me. I threw my neck back and gave her a finger-five. Then we were silent. The boat moved smoothly across the surface of the River river. I pulled out Jadawl's map. It looked like what we were doing. The perspective drawn from behind me: two figures sitting at the prow of a boat, moving toward the shore, one with a square of something in his hand, the other leaning over the side of the boat, with most of an arm in the water. So what, Jadawl? I wanted to ask him. Would this have been more interesting had I opened the map when I was, for instance, in the pedestrian rotary? Probably,

but I'd thought the longer I waited before studying the map the more potent would be its cartography. "Damn, a Comptroller's life isn't easy." I had slipped getting out of the boat. It was one of my fans, offering assistance. Be gone, I belted.

CIT MOHALY

I wanted to have tea with Triti. That was the bottom line. Yet, I couldn't return to her empty-handed. I needed to bring back something that would account for my absence. I hoped she had stopped thinking about our altercation, had already initiated the process of forgetting that would put that unfortunate event behind some opaque wall of her mind, because as long as we tried to talk about it, our sitting together would be flawed. Comptrolling had become tedious without those infused sips of Triti's teas. (I was sitting on the terrace of a restaurant, watching the sunset, contemplating a glass of sparkling wine.) It was true that I had barely drunk anything since I saw her (the liquid in a glass being like a portal), though I had eaten plenty. You have to eat

to do this job successfully. And you have to figure out how to keep your feminine lines, even when you bulk up on protein bars. Of course, Triti had mastered this brilliantly. I was not Triti; I was of that slightly younger generation, where we were all short and stocky.

The terrace was full of couples. I thought about Triti. It was not what you would expect. The tables were not arranged congenially, so that the people of one table could meet those at the next. I'm sitting outside, I said, trying to keep my voice down. I had this audio recorder, and was looking around, taking notes. Five men, six women on the terrace, I whispered into the device. I didn't count myself (though I withheld this from the recorder). Two women and one man occupied one table; they had white wine and cheese. For some reason, I could not speak of them. Two men appear engaged in machinations, I did announce awkwardly. One face of this couple is turned toward me; his eyes show homosexual delight. I rewound the recorder. His face glows delightedly, I reassessed. A man and a woman sat off to my left. A man and a woman having dinner, I said out of the side of my mouth. "Sir, could you please put

that away?" Two gentlemen sitting in dark glasses near the railing: one places a small revolver on the table. The gun points in the general direction of his companion. It was good to get every detail. I sat back and stared into my glass. Triti came to mind, also something about an interval of doors. Two women, one light, one dark, sit close over small cups of coffee. My voice sounded tired. Two women, I tried again, more upbeat this time. I didn't like it. Two women, I let it draw out, in the way of bird watching. A man sits alone. The waiter brings him a steak. A woman approached his table. A woman joins the man; he gets up and pulls her chair away from the table. I hadn't seen that in some time. He waits for her to sit. She sits; he moves back to his side of the table. I stopped the recorder to play back my last description. His side of the table—should I have corrected it? These were round tables. Four men and four women appear all at once on the terrace, I said this in a projected voice. My head lay on my forearm. This large group stood there seemingly waiting for us—those of us seated comfortably—to do something. We are doing nothing, I shouted (though still in repose). We didn't move. Some of us even turned our attention back to

our conversations. The four women and the four men, who, since they entered, had been clumped according to gender, now split off into inter-gender couples. They walk, almost in a waltz, around the edge of the terrace, I reported. A hush surrounds them. Yet, no tables became available. The waiter brought out a tray bearing glasses of wine. I thought I should say what they were wearing, because it was entirely ordinary, which was strange when you looked at how they were acting. Some of the men were wearing khakis but strutting around like partygoers in tuxedos. It was that disgusting. Yet, no one would yield. Everyone ordered another of what they'd been consuming, and I stared into my glass of wine. I thought of Triti. The four late-arriving couples are growing restless. They have lost the spontaneity of their entrance. The women move toward each other again. The men put their hands in their pockets, try to come up with a plan. The man with the revolver picks it up from the table and tosses it in the air. Sir, please put that away, the waiter says, I said this all into the recorder, with a smile on my face. When did I last smile? The four women and four men leave the terrace behind and walk off into the night. We all remained for

some time longer. The sun had set and the city grew quiet then it grew loud again. Several young women brought candles to each of the tables and many young men came and lit them. The man with the delighted eyes stood up suddenly, said, "No," seemingly with a lot of force, then began laughing and patting the back of his companion, whose face I had not yet seen. The joyous man makes a scene, I announced. What I should be making a record of is this internal dialogue I'm having with Triti, where she stumbles over her words. Something has happened to make her tongue swell. She is not supposed to eat fish eggs (we are having dinner inside me) but does so anyway because of their color. Her tongue swells, but we try to go on with our conversation. We are talking about street allocations, and my opinions are the most contemporary, as I'm the current Comptroller for this city. I'm mentioning for the fifth time that almost three years have passed since she manned these streets, and it's right then that her tongue grows so thick that saliva begins to pour out from the sides. I say to her that she should just nod now instead of speaking. I say it would not be good for her to shake her head, as that would spray spit everywhere. I return

to the topic at hand. She nods and looks very angry. Street allocation should be determined by measuring out all of the qualified voids for a given area, I tell her quite confidently. I know she thinks voids cannot be assessed, thus are numerically irrelevant, but since she's been barred (by her own hand, I should add) from speaking I continue. The qualified voids give you frag specifics up to six percent certainty. So you can lay a street here, lay one there, and only need to abide by the voids to rebuild your city. I wanted to record this conversation, because it was the one most pertinent to my day, but it did not make sense doing this with an external device. I worried about accuracy, to which I was beholden. The dark night of Ravicka. My deflating glass of wine. "Sir, please put that away." Now, the dinner menu arrives. I received the dinner menu from a new waiter. I had been there a long time. But, so remained several of the parties I described earlier. Before, I had said, we were all short and stocky, because I was trying to get at something about my generation. But, as commonly happens, I found myself at a loss of further description. I sat on the terrace dreaming of numbers, staring into my wine glass. I ordered mussels and a salad. I belched

in time with everyone else: you felt that groan of internal processing lift the city and return it gently to the ground. We were all short and stocky because we spent our days going up and down the mountains. Our youth was the time of the despair. We began to age once it was over. And that is all I have to say about it. I try to eat only when I'm hungry. I am eating mussels, is the last thing I record into my device. I am eating mussels and salad. Was it true that when I returned the recorder to my bag the others on the terrace seemed to relax? The gun was removed from the table of the man sitting with another man, neither of whose faces shone with delight. "Sir, please put that away," a new waiter requested. We were moving into deep night. It was hard to say whether our presence there was profitable for the restaurant. Usually you want a high turnover but occasionally you get into a kind of homey feeling: the owner looks up from the books and thinks largely, "These are my people." It was hard to tell if that night was the night. I thought about Triti. I'd have to return to her soon. I hated the idea that she might replace me if she began to think I'd left her permanently. She was not a patient woman. I was a patient woman that night with

my glass of wine sitting on top of all my recent failures. The map of the day returned to me. The detour, which had made my memory hazy. Even now as I looked back over it something enormous was lodged there, some interval of doors. At first, I thought I was seeing no. 96, but this obstruction was too large to stand for a house. I didn't know what to call it; my head began to ache. My wine glass had lost all coolness hours ago. I couldn't do much with it now, drop a coin in it, see it shimmer maybe in the light. That shadow on my memory would remain impervious. It was time to shut it all down and go home. I uttered something—thinking again about the clot on my memory—and surprised myself. I remembered. This had never happened before.

### THE STRANGE BUILDING

I circled the exterior, in search of an entrance. I could not ascertain the purpose of this structure. It was situated on the corner, just off a rotary, in a residential neighborhood, but it in no way resembled a house or tenement or duplex. The lack of light (I had traveled back here upon leaving the restaurant, but, regrettably, took a direct route due to the lateness of the hour) made it impossible to understand the building's orientation with regard to the street. I stood in this spot many hours ago, certain that I would not remember what I was seeing, because I never did. But I did remember, which was astonishing, so made my way back here. Yet the place I stood—my feeling in standing there—did not resemble what I seemed to have felt earlier. These did not appear

to be the same details—the shape, the cut of the windows. Obviously, they had to be (it really was only five hours ago)—It *was* a strange building. What had been strange about it previously was its incongruence with the houses on the street. It was vast; the entire outer walls were covered in ivy; it seemed to have hundreds of doors, even on the upper floors, though there were no balconies, all in perfect rows and columns, while the houses around it were the usual cylindrical one-story yurts one found on this side of the mountain. What was odd tonight was that no matter how far I walked around the building I was only seeing its back. This nighttime façade, in stark contrast to its daytime rival, was singularly unwelcoming. Not only did it fail to present a door, there also appeared to be no windows. It was one solid, unbroken, cascade of wall. I began to suspect that though I had the remarkable fortune of remembering something that I normally forgot, I had not remembered it all correctly. Was this a different strange building on the corner of another of the many rotaries that filter the heavy traffic of this city? It was late. I had been outside all day. I was beginning to lose perspective. How can you design a building with no entrance, with no way

of seeing out? The moon was hidden in clouds that night. There was a faint light from a nearby street lamp; occasionally a throng of cars would enter the rotary all at once, creating a terrible racket, accelerating and honking through to their exits, and then again this absolute silence would descend. But each time the cars filled the rotary all their lights threw a kind of beam onto the building, exposing a small square about a meter beneath the roof. The walls of the building did not meet at ninety-degree angles, so it was hard for me to say exactly on which side of the building I'd found this carved-out square. It could only have been one or two of the seemingly endless sides of the structure—those in proximity to the road—but, due to the fantastic sloping of the walls, the square never seemed to be in one place. It slid across the surface of the walls, much like I was sliding on the gravel that surrounded the base of the building. What was the purpose of this square? And was it really in motion? Would that make it some sort of camera? I didn't want to sit down because I worried I would fall asleep. Were I home I would have gone to bed long ago. The slopes did not end in angles. I felt the more I stared at this building the more it changed. The walls



sloped dramatically across the length of the building, and when you followed one wall, one slope, it was not an edge that you found, rather something that curved. But the curve was more in the center of the slope than it was at the end of a particular "side," and that's why I couldn't understand the shape of the building, nor hardly contemplate its countless sides. I stood back and stared at it. There was not enough light to tell now but if I remembered correctly from this afternoon the walls of the building were painted a deep brown, almost mauve. The material was stone or stucco, I couldn't tell. But, it was striking to see such a dark color in a neighborhood of bright-colored houses. This one would have been more appropriate in my neighborhood. (Is this what drew me to it?) Yet, here it was. I bowed before it. I really wanted us to get past these formalities (me not finding a door, etc.). I bowed and started circling again. After some time of this, I noticed that something had changed about the square. It looked lit up, like a lamp had been turned on within its frame. Suddenly, the building had taken on depth and was no longer just sloshing that square around. It had an inside, which meant there had to be an entrance somewhere. It occurred to me that I

should return tomorrow morning when, I imagined, the apparent secrets of this building would be vulnerable to direct sunlight. I would not have been surprised to learn I'd been standing in front of the door the whole time (if this were that same building from earlier then certainly I would have been, as that building was covered in doors), but for now, as much as I groped I could find nothing but smooth, uncut stone. I looked up; the light still shone. I was exhausted. My circling had become exercise. I sat on the ground, but out of the way of the occasional beams coming off the rotary, whose appearances were lessening anyway with the day concluding as it was. When had I been outside so late before? Not since my youth. I was having a blast, but was lonely too. I thought about Triti. The building had taken her from my mind for a while, but my lack of success in getting inside it returned her, cruelly, back to me. Triti, I'm coming, was all I could muster, looking up at this hulking whirlpool. I threw a rock at it; it resounded. That didn't make sense. I was enchanted. That didn't make sense either. It was as if I had suddenly understood night. What it meant for the sky to go dark. I threw another rock at the sloping walls of that strange building.

The sound it gave off was like bells tolling, but wasn't. It was digital, almost. Perhaps, something newer than digital. I didn't know what that word would be. I threw another rock, this one smaller. The night grew colder. I zipped up my jacket and remembered who I was: the city's one and only Comptroller. I remembered the ticket book in my pocket, my stripes, and, most importantly, my authority. I had every access. I wrote the recent pamphlet *Breaking and Entering*, about staying "up to code." What was I doing out here? Why had I stayed so long without taking action? I was sweating now, but nothing in the building changed. My revelation had not penetrated it. The light coming from deep within that square remained on. I thought about Triti. I unzipped my jacket. I sat down. I threw a rock at the building. It was still night. I was the only one left in the world, it seemed. The last pedestrian of Ravicka. It was too much responsibility. I lay down. Had no. 32 ever taken on a physical form? It must have for us even to think of it. It struck me as peculiar that my core function in Comptrolling was monitoring houses that were solid and visible versus those that were invisible. Was that someone else's job? Impossible. You wouldn't give that task to a lesser, to an

assistant Comptroller, for example. But, it was true that there was little concern for no. 32, only in how it helped one to locate no. 96, nothing about itself. For me to head out as I did in search of it was a radical act. I wondered what Triti would say. "That disgusting," probably. I threw a rock at the building. The light went out. I threw another. The light came back on. I didn't know if the two events were related. I hadn't yet thrown a rock at the square. This might have been the time for it. But I would have to stand up, and I would have to treat it as a fixed point, which was hard, because it really did seem to be sloshing forward and back. How would my aim fare this late at night? I threw the rock and then I heard something. I couldn't tell whether it had reached the intended target. But, what I heard was a voice, which was both exciting and disconcerting at once. Yet, I'd been so excited and disconcerted when it spoke that I missed entirely what it had said. I reached down for another rock. I heard the voice again. It seemed to be taunting me. This was strange. My stripes illumined. What was it saying? I really didn't know. It came from too far away. I was reluctant to begin yelling back at this person; it was late. I was afraid my voice would carry in the wrong di-

rection, perhaps to where Triti rested. It would be a travesty to begin waking up the neighbors. What could I possibly say to explain my presence on that property that late at night? I threw a rock at the building. I was trying to say come down. It made a pattern, not quite Morse code, but rhythmic all the same: I thought it was working when the person grew quiet. He or she was still saying words, but more in a lulling tone. Did that person want to calm me? I bent to pick up another rock from the ground. The clouds cleared. Suddenly the moon was very bright. It did not shine on the building. The light in the square remained on, and it continued sloshing along the wall. Instead the moon shone on the grounds surrounding the structure, revealing grass in addition to the loose gravel. I inspected the grass. There was something peculiar about it. How could I explain—it did not appear real. It was an unnaturally dark green color, felt plastic, was high and thick, but you couldn't run your fingers through it, as grass often makes you want to do. You started to comb it, then experienced pain. The grass cut you; it was very unpleasant. I couldn't explain why but I dropped a rock upon it, this patch of grass I'd been studying. It seemed to have needed it. This

was a bigger rock, perhaps three times the size of the pebbles I'd been throwing at the building. I dropped it. The gesture wasn't violent. I was trying to be casual. The city had become a void. It was very deep into the night. I needed to go home. However, I knew if I walked away from this site now, even if I returned at first light tomorrow, it would be a different place entirely. It would be that beautiful structure I had witnessed earlier, the one covered in doors. Or would be a new structure, or would be gone. I needed to get from it tonight everything there was. Nothing happened when the rock hit that patch of grass; nothing happened in the grass, that is. Yet, something changed about the building. It seemed to shift on its axis. It appeared tilted, subtly, toward the sky, dislodged from the foundation. I had no proof of the new situation besides my own disorientation: the portion of the wall that had been at eye level was now above my head. I wanted to bring the building closer, but all my actions toward it seemed to make it unreachable. I didn't want to think about the psychology of the building; that would be preposterous. But the events of the last hours had left me no choice. Was there even a person speaking inside? Or was this all the building? My attention

returned to that patch of artificial grass. I wanted to say something. I thought of Triti. She would say, "Go home, Jakobi!" and look at me like I'd lost something. She'd want to grab me by the hand, but it wouldn't be gentle. Soon, I will return to her, I thought solemnly. I will, I remembered with more excitement. I could go to her tomorrow. But, not like this, not with nothing more than these walks to show for myself, for my trek through time. I reached into the grass and retrieved that heavy rock. Then a voice spoke plainly: "Is everything all right?" And nearly killed me. I was not expecting such clarity of speech. Then, I heard my own voice reply, Would you have some sea salt, and realized these were sounds coming from the recorder in my breast pocket. I had switched it to playback mode inadvertently. The exchange brought my mind back to my dinner on the terrace of Zizacs and to a deeper question about the precise location of the present. If I couldn't make anything happen in these moments of occupation, was I even qualified to say I had been in time? You do expect the world to respond eventually. I dropped the rock in the grass.

## No . 32

"When you decide to conduct a geoscog, everything you do from that moment on contributes to your result, and that's why the calculations must be impeccable. That is also why you must follow a prescribed route to your place of study. I could not walk down Hvarsaan to get to no. 32 though this would be the most efficient way, because I needed to follow the degree parallel, which was not Hvarsaan but Czorcic. From Czorcic, I would ascend the Fallender hill, then proceed through the square, which sits at the rear of the historical museum, upon which many years ago was added the 'great mirror,' and then take lefts on Walda and Ayerkradaja. The house, best understood as 'no. 32,' does not exist, appropriately. All the same, it is located on Bravash-

binder Street . . ." The recorder has been playing since first thing this morning. It has taken several hours of listening to arrive at the day of the "miracle parade." I haven't slept well since that night of my wandering, and in that time I've only been able to work from home, being in a fragile state. Today I'm trying to reconnect with the science behind my task (that is, completing the geoscog for no. 96), and so for the past couple of hours I've been digging into the depths of my work closet. This morning I remembered the Walser Street case, another situation where a house was not where it was supposed to be. Although, there, it was the situation of one house taking on the identity of another: in literal fact, 1839 Walser becoming 2 Hladaly through a bewildering process that, because it lacked precedent, needed to be properly catalogued. Using specialized instruments from the South—the T34 byr router, the skadyver, the 16-55 trakruler, and other such recalibrating utensils, I devised the category, "Inbreedation." That does not describe exactly what's going on with no. 96, but it does get me thinking that what might be making things so cumbersome is a missing category. I have, all this time, been assuming no. 96's problem is encryptment, which

the city's engineers have studied exhaustively, but now I'm beginning to see that it defies the established parameters of encryptment in too important of a way to be ignored. I turned off the recorder. There were sounds coming from the front of the flat. I have divided my apartment into work and pleasure zones. My cat Peepee sits in the pleasure zone waiting for me to come and read the newspaper. But, I can't this morning, I yell down the hallway. Peepee, I am simply too busy. Is it possible that the skadyver can take the frag measures that elude the frag-pantometer? This would be unorthodox, but what if I adjusted for the three-axion folders on the skadyver's metric cable, would this allow me to override the relay fixture? I turn the recorder on. I repeat what I have said. Then something peculiar happens: someone buzzes me from downstairs. I haven't had a guest in sixty-seven days. Not because I don't like people. Who is it? I speak into my telephone. "It's Hematois. I'm here comrade. Buzz me in." Hematois is here? I feel as though I've been knocked over the head. I haven't seen him in years. How did he get to Ravicka? How did you get to Ravicka, I ask. And have you gone by Triti's? They are companions of a sort. "Let me in

girlfriend," he says. Peepee is waiting to see what I'll do. She's got her paw on the front page of the paper, giving a look that says, "Please, don't open the door." But it's Hematois, and he's probably walked here from Ljubljana. Yet, my finger is still suspended above the button that's to give him access to the building. I'm happy he's here but, like Peepee, I can't help but remember his last visit. You can't use my espresso maker, I say through the phone. And my books are off limits. Does Triti know you're here? "I need every time to meet her," he answers obliquely. There seems to be a lot of wind. Is it windy out? He says something to the effect of no but it takes him several sentences. "Are you there?" he asks after some moments of silence. Did you hear what I said about the espresso maker, Hematois? "I did hear the plain of it," he says in the formal Ravic of our first years. I press the appropriate button and hang up the phone. Peepee . . . But she doesn't want to hear it. I sit with her and await the arrival of my longtime friend Hematois Yerbenjenki. It takes him close to an hour to reach the door, yet he's incapable of explaining why. "All I did was enter and walk up." He looks at Peepee for support, "Cats also have such journeys. Am I right

Pepe?" She walks stiffly out the room. "Jakobi!" He turns to me. "It has been too long. We missed you at Port Aun Frij last summer." What are you talking about, Hematois? I haven't heard from you in three years. Did you give *tij* to Triti? He falls silent. This man in his mid-fifties, dressed in a fabulous natural-colored linen suit, hat in hand, finishes off all of his outfits with red plaid dress shoes—these shoes now on top of the unread newspaper. "I have been thinking, my dear, and came urgently to share with you." I watch his face, waiting to see if he will laugh. "And now, my friend, I need your hand. I can't go to Triti without it." With reluctance, I extend my left hand toward him (keeping the good one behind my back). He seems baffled by my gesture. "I'm being serious, Jakobi. I need your help." This was the last thing I wanted to hear. It seemed no one understood the magnitude of my responsibilities. Hematois (a recording started to play in my mind), I am head of the Office of the Comptroller for the city-country Ravicka. I wear the green stripes. I am the author of the book *Regulating the Book of Regulations*, which is referenced widely, and I have recently completed a pamphlet entitled *Breaking and Entering*, which I think will blow

out the halls of the exclusive Code Society. And what's even greater is that I'm knee-deep in an unqualified mystery. In fact, I was just about to consult the Walser project when you rang. Peepee was sitting comfortably in her chair, and I was in the work zone. I had woken with the brilliant idea of consulting the past, when a different kind of past interrupted me. (It did occur to me that Hematois' arrival could be serendipitous, but I have only known his interventions to lead to disaster.) It is you, after three years of silence. We look at each other. He is thinking thoughts as well. It has become difficult to voice our opinions. Peepee returns to the room. She likes estrangement. Welcome back, Peepee, I say aloud. "Yes, Peepee . . ." says Hematois before he drifts off. Again, I remember the suspended activity of the work zone. Hematois, I'm glad you're here. It's just that you've caught me in the middle of something very important. There is a disappeared house. He gasps and sits down, puts his head in his hands. Peepee is caught between his back and the chair, but oddly seems comfortable. She makes only minimal muffled noises. "Please tell me no," he says. No, I offer, quietly. "Nein, please tell me No," he starts wailing. Again, Peepee flees. It would not be impossible to imagine the whole day

transpiring this way. It has happened before. But, I am in the middle of too much stuff, I accidentally say aloud. So I have to finish the thought: to . . . handle . . . any new . . . this . . . He's clearly disappointed. I offer: What kind of help do you need? But, he's become sullen. "A disappeared house . . ." he keeps saying, as if this is such a strange occurrence in Ravicka. We spend the rest of the morning in the work zone. I can't tell where his problem intersects with my own, but he seems to think they are related, so related, in fact, that he dismisses the suggestion that I might benefit from a description of what he's come to do. I have pulled out the trakruler and the 500cs place spade from the Walser study, I say into the recorder. Hematois clears his throat. I depress the record button. "You have pulled out the 500cs and the trakruler," he says, I think, by way of correction. I ask him if there is anything else he needs to get off his chest. "Only that your cs is rusted." I am not planning to use these instruments for no. 96—this case really isn't about Inbreedation—so it doesn't matter what shape they're in. I'm looking at them to get an idea. And then I remember I want to retrofit the skadyver. He doesn't need to know. Anything else? I ask. "Just that maybe Peepee has gone to the bathroom on this spot." Peepee doesn't

visit the work zone. Hematois stands up quickly and pats his ass. "I have not gone," he says indignantly. "I have not gone, Jakobi." I was not implying that you had, Hematois, only that it was impossible for that spot to belong to Peepee. It's probably water from that hanging plant. "You will ruin the floor, Jakobi." Shall we get back to it, then? I press record. (It was like a breeze had taken up, and a rather hot and bleary day became crisp and bright. I was able to work intensely for fifteen minutes before Hematois interrupted me to request lunch. I had two mysteries: what to do with him and what to do with no. 96. I wanted to see if I could get more exact frag measures from the skadyver. With a coil bit I found I reconfigured the skadyver's baseboard, so that essentially it began to understand itself as a pantometer, but better than a pantometer, it could access underground mo-fixtures, the basic function of any skadyver. It baffles me that no one has thought to make this adjustment before, assuming that the skadyver will function properly. I have to go outside to test it.) I'm not saying these thoughts into the recorder. They run parallel to my actual speech. Hematois and I are not on the same page, so I have to be cautious about what I say. I'm us-

ing all the same words, just in a different order, with emphasis not on the instruments but on the nearest adverbs, sometimes having to repeat the emphasis in cases where there are not enough adverbs, and alongside that trying to figure out how to get more adverbs in. I turn off the recorder. Hematois appears startled. "Houses," he says meditatively. I explain to him how I must continue my studies in the streets. I have been away from the city for too long. I think about Triti. How long before she forgets me? I have lost track of time, of the time between us. This will be the first of a long line of excuses. We gather the necessary materials with a lot of laughter; of course, when Hematois goes to the bathroom, I gather the real necessary materials. Thus, my bag is heavy. His presence is still a mystery. He continues to insist that his struggle is wrapped up in my struggle, but I'm not ready to share with him the details of my case. I am the Comptroller after all. But company is appreciated. Hematois wants me to leave the recorder home. "I am not here," he whispers. I ignore him in favor of saying so long to Peepee. She understands how I work. It may be days before I return.



## HEMATOIS

Once we were outside, Hematois grabbed my hand and launched into a delirious confession, "It's strange our encounter with the city, when we are walking about like this, as two lines in a continuous bisection of approaching space (It's strange [he said more quietly] that I was able to enter Ravicka. It had not been long before that I was in Zürich, and things did not go well there. Things did not go well in Paris, nor well in Riga, not good in Stofan, either. I entered each of these cities trying to say just a few words in their newspapers about architecture and contemporary design. Of course, I had to name the places where they had failed, because each city's new buildings were like cardboard, and cardboard doesn't stand up to history, I was trying

to say. I attempted to approach their failed buildings in the middle of the night, with a small fire—just to make a mark—and this angered everybody in those cities. People want you to stick with paper, to leave no indelible marks. Jakobi, no one uses stone anymore. You can't find brick anywhere. When I reached Rah, and they let me through, I worried it was only so they could corner me later, when I was alone and selfless, and send me back to Riga, back to Stofan, and this is why I did not come to see you right away, and why I must hold Triti away. Truthfully, I have been in the city for eight days. My entry, thus far, has come to little effect. In Zürich, I met someone, rather I was approached one morning as I was enjoying a newspaper—two women and a man approached my table and asked if I were a translator. Well, as you know, I am fluent in eleven languages, but I did not use this competency to assume their language was one of mine. They had introduced themselves in a halting German but the question as to my translation capabilities was in Ravic, of all obscurities! You know how it is when we find ourselves abroad. *Feleedpur!* I of course did the natural thing and began yelling and lifting everyone, spreading *tij* all around. But, nor was

Ravic the target language, I came to find after all that cheer, when their desperate faces returned and they began again looking over their shoulders. 'Why are we outside?' one of the women asked. 'Cousin, will you accompany us to our hotel room,' followed the second woman. The man finished, 'It won't take long and it'll be much safer for us.' I was becoming very anxious with all this cryptic behavior, but I couldn't help my interest peaking. What in the world was going on and what did it have to do with translation? Somehow my two favorite activities had converged in the countenance of these three people: translation and philanthropy. I love to help people. I tried to withhold my excitement. Clearly, these were somber times for them. We walked to their hotel, the Strauzi, in silence. Once in their room—actually, it took nearly all night to understand their story, but they did start on it right away. But once there, they swallowed in unison and began pouring things down their throats—a golden, resplendent liquid, mostly. I don't know why it took so long to get the shape of what they were saying, other than the grace of the language. No, there were a lot of things that didn't add up. And, really to bring it all together I had to ask

my twenty questions: 1. Why are you here? 2. What are you doing with those boxes? 3. Why does the tag on your luggage say you've been in Japan? 4. Why didn't you finish those grapes? 5. How can you go from eating red grapes to drinking this strange liquid without a blink, without even clearing your throat? Why are you eating seedless grapes but also figs, which are full of seeds, almost entirely seeds? (6) [They handed me a slip of paper] This text is very ordinary, why does it need to be translated? (7) I turned to the man, whose name was Renato, Where are you from? (8) And 9. 'Why do these women talk three times the length that you do?' 'What will you do with these bottles when you're done with the room?' (10) Eleven, I said: I think you already know what this text says, why do you need a translator? Why (12) are you showing me this text if this isn't the text that you want me to translate? 13. What is a front door in this context? Where are you going, young lady? (14) Yes, please, but will you pour mine in this glass and also that one? I had to explain why I took necessary precautions. I had to explain my allegiance to the French language. 15. Why am I here? 16. Why is there only milk chocolate? If you wear silk

during the day how do you possibly up the ante at night? (17) Are we in Rome? I ask sarcastically. (18) Can you contest this? (19) Did you receive this summons by courier or did someone hand it to you, did they call you from the Hotel desk or did someone slink up on you, did you touch the document, are these your fingerprints? These last questions I asked all at once, in one syrupy breath. I had grown tired and was confused and couldn't trust that all was what it appeared to be. I didn't know anymore if these people were in trouble or simply pretending to be so to gain my trust, to lure me into a maze of questions with no answers, with nothing more than hiccups to punctuate time, and blurry vision. I agreed to help. What else could I do? I'd been with them for hours. I'd displaced them. Renato had had to sleep on the floor. They were a group of shop owners from the coast asking for my help; they were journalists with a conspiracy theory; they were coaches for a rugby team. —I know I haven't said what it was they wanted from me. How can I?" Hematois ceased whispering. In fact, for a long time he said nothing. He walked very slowly, on a diagonal. He walked me into stores without realizing it, so began to grow agitated

when our slow unraveling walk was halted by a new fact of standing in a line. "What now, Jakobi?" Hematois exclaimed. "It's amazing this city." He grabbed my hand again. I didn't know what to do with the story he'd just told me: it lay in fragments everywhere. He'd grown clammy in his narration. He touched the ear of a passerby and she complied with a hip check. We were in cuit centali. With Hematois in tow this very familiar territory felt like a maze. He seems to do this to places. Tovabrüg would not end: we got on a bus. How long ago had we left the house? It was good to sit down and give in to something larger, this immense moving vehicle, which ran along its own logic of the city, a logic that usually did not interfere with that of the Comptroller. But, it was hard to maintain measurements when Hematois sat so heavily next to me—his body heavy, though his head (his eyes) were very light and fast moving.

The city was teeming, though over the last year I'd begun to notice something for which I had no language. These were not regulatory violations, precisely. Rather, what I experienced was more a sense that the land was turning itself inside out. Not so much that the color of the ground had changed or all the grasses had vanished. Not like a rockiness becoming sandy. The built environment did not get sucked into a sieve; the trees didn't wither. But, it was as if a negative space had opened—in everything. Most things, or just downtown. Ciut centali and the outskirts. It was hard to pin down something you couldn't see and couldn't measure. So, I began to wonder on that crosstown bus, where Hematois was leaning forward with each palm on each corresponding thigh, propped up and out like a carnival, sweating and looking out every window (I watched his head bob and wondered what it was he wasn't telling me)—I began to wonder if the problem of no. 96 had to do with this new discomfort in the ground. Strange to ask when there was already the old discomfort, which had given rise to geoscography, my art and livelihood. Geoscography preceded me, so I can't say what the land felt like in the time before, where everything must have been stable

and predictable, subject to one measurement, never seen again. Or perhaps, it was only that at some point we recognized a phenomenon that had always gone on. Buildings had always moved, perhaps. But, a building in motion is not a building vanished. Though, again, something might only be vanished because you do not know where it is. —Where did Hematois and I want to go? Whose mystery were we unraveling—his or mine? “We are on an intricacy, Jakobi. We are setting forth,” he said, answering what I thought I'd asked rhetorically and only to myself. I want to eat, I admitted with my neck bent; hunger was where the questions always led me. But, the bus was now taking us up into the hills, into cit Saüt, which sits on the opposite side of the city from cit Ramtala, out of my jurisdiction and too close to Bashir for my taste.

#### INTERRUPTION

"In which Hematois Yerbenjenki takes the Comptroller's recorder in hand and fixes all that he has broken. The Comptroller spends his days in the city, but he tells you not what he sees only what he measures. You have no sense of the colors or spatial relationships of anything. You do not know how old anything is. *Astánga lô*. It was a sunny day in Ravicka, and the mountains on both the northern and southern sides of the city were clear and full of lines. One could follow the lines until he had a novel in his eyes. Two obviously sophisticated men left the white brick building, after saying so long to the tiger-striped kitten that seemed to read in his companion's absence. The kitten didn't wear glasses but always appeared as if he'd just taken them off, rubbing his eyes

as best as he could with those paws. Can you imagine what the Comptroller is wearing today, other than his tired old jacket? No, and that's why I am here. (Jakobi, is this why I came back?) He wears white denim pants! He wears a white jacket with white pants, thinking it brings out his brown undertones. You are the color of hazel nuts, Jakobi. I had never noticed. But the man in white walks out of his white-bricked house into a bright day, where *dahar* makes everything soft, and with him strolls a dapper fellow in a light gray linen suit. He is not hot, because there is a chill in the air. It is autumn. The two move with stealth as they seek to solve two mysteries, both having to do with the reigning structures of Ravicka—its buildings. But they didn't simply slink out of the neighborhood like graffiti artists; they participated in well established rituals of observation and greeting; there was a hawk on a wire; the street was still wet from an early morning rain; there was a man behind a cart selling coffee and breads. His cart was also white, but dirty and weathered. Jakobi called the man's name, Elibet, and turned and flew *tij* at him. And the morning cracked with bodies falling over words. The gentlemen were admired, because when asked

where they were headed, they could give the names of eight different neighborhoods in only a matter of seconds. It was a bright afternoon; people moved around with intent, but not as brusquely as Hematois and the Comptroller. The Comptroller moved brusquely—I correct myself—it was Hematois who tried to interject poise. You will probably hear when you play this back a most unfortunate disagreement between the parties in question; it merely displays that their respective sleuthing techniques had not quite melded, but the day was long. The two friends stayed close and tried to talk about the old days as the sun hung steady. Back to what I was saying: Ravicka is a part of the physical world and should be described as abundantly as any other place that gets talked about and walked over for hours. Anyone listening to this recording will have no idea what I'm looking at right now if I don't say what I'm seeing! The Comptroller doesn't see the world. She doesn't even know—I suspect—what she looks like. We are passing along a street whose name I must withhold from my account but whose main feature is that of iron. You have to leave the names out; otherwise people will try to find you. No, I'm sorry. We are working. But, a clue:

iron gates run along the length of it, iron bars and turrets or whatever roped by ivy. Sometimes there is an opening in the gate that leads to a house or set of flats built some centuries ago, other times, though, there is just a patch of grass sitting between the gate and . . . I don't know . . . nothing. The earth bends here and there and you can't see more than two meters in front of you. Jakobi, walk to that void! He refuses. It's for the record. I would go but I need to stay here and record what happens, what I see. Jakobi puts his large bag down. He acts like an arrival has occurred. Some of the gates are contorted to resemble numbers and geometries, an octagon, for example. The gates are black. Did I say that? Iron. So, maybe description is not so very easy for the gentlemen. He stands tall in his linen suit with an idea about how to help the Comptroller and how to help himself see what is not there or find what is missing. Do we need description? Jakobi, why have you asked me to do this? The Comptroller reaches for this machine, but I am not done. Can you smell this place where we have stopped, this street of fences? The iron was forged in geometries that are not the shapes we're accustomed to, thus I struggle in making them into

images. How do you say . . . something twisted, made to extend out, then twisted back up over itself, smoothed down, then pierced or drilled with holes? How do you move something so solid and intrepid, Jakobi? Sometimes, there are houses bearing the mark of a certain century; I'm saying they look old but also well kept. We are on a street of riches, moving incredibly slowly. In fact, we aren't moving because the Comptroller has put his bag down, his excessive looking bag. . . . I turned the recorder off so that a certain exchange could happen between the gentlemen detectives, who are on their respective missions, yet bounded together on this day of walking. While we were away, I insisted that we refrain from moving along non-descriptive streets, streets devoid of people in clothing that could be described in vibrant detail, streets with no ornate bridges, no real happenings. So, we have returned to cit Mohaly, and the day is growing denser with people and food trucks. I see sausage everywhere. Some have been grilled, but most seem merely boiled, and all lay in buns. I want to stop and eat one, but Jakobi refuses, as it has not been long since we stopped on my behalf for espresso. This is why he can't see the land before him. He is not an ordi-

nary woman. Doesn't he notice a new style of dress, where the pants are now worn nearly at the breastbone, and the shirt gets tucked in, and the pants taper at the bottom. People rush their hands through their hairs to make sculptural content: wings sticking out, birds perched on the wings. I try to talk to some of the men, who add blazers to their ensembles. I say, 'Ah, hello gentleman. When you wear this what do you do for the day?' But, often these men are playing cellos in some open space. Not together. Singly and without music stands. I think people are more serious when they have music stands. It sounds like we're standing still, right, letting the traffic move through us? But, no, the Comptroller keeps us in motion. The recorder grew heavy in my hand. I put it in my breast pocket to see if I could record from there, but when I reviewed the sound there was too much disturbance. Jakobi says there is too much hair on my chest. I don't know this. I don't know how *he* would know it. I wear what is called button-ups. Some of the women wear these cute button-up shirts with much shorter cardigans over them, usually with short skirts and tights, tall boots. I go to stand next to them because I hear everyone is wearing grapefruit oil

these days. If they are, it's too subtle. I find no light-heartedness, just exhaust, the smell of cookies. Description is strange, Jakobi. Well, what order do you use? Do you go buildings, people, ground? Do you go ground and people, leaving out buildings? Do you go only buildings because that's why we're outside anyway—to move between buildings, then to go inside them, sometimes to stay? How are we living this life among buildings? Okay. All right. I have gotten away from my objective. I want you to know what this world looks like, from where we stand, and how we divide space. I'm trying to name things and put colors to them. Nobody's mentioned cars. A blue sedan; a gray sedan; a minivan; a jeep, those sports vehicles, all in a row, just went by. There isn't a light at this corner. The rule is you stop, you hold four seconds then you go, unless somebody is at your right. In that case, they go, then you go. We walked out of the Comptroller's street and saw someone we knew, which is usual. I saw blue jays taking off from a tree; I saw them land on a railing. Somebody in a fall coat got out of a cab, repeating the name "Ulugar, Ulugar" on a phone he held in front of his mouth, then disappeared in a building. If we were able to follow all

the people we saw, we would end up there—in buildings, all over the city. It seemed silly to be outside merely to go inside again. Eck! This observing is stupid. Jakobi, you couldn't have been more right—"

—

"Still bad!" The recorder was thrown into my lap, and Hematois went dark, as if preparing for slumber. He had been replaying the tracks he recorded earlier, hoping distance would have altered their effects, but to him they still seemed to suggest some failing that I didn't entirely grasp. We had reached the highest point in all of Ravicka, the crest of cit Saüt, and were shrouded in evening fog. This was the pause before everything reset: from here I would take Vlosser and walk straight back to the core of my mystery, except when I arrive it won't be a mystery any longer. It will be numbers, laid out like facts, small rocks to bend down and pick up in such predictable and orderly fashion that soon you're lulled by the unbreaking rhythm. The comfort allows you to



do other things, such as eat or have tea with a long lost friend. I folded Hematois into the front pocket of my bag and breathed in the day's vapor. This wasn't the end of him, but I thought it would be good to hold him close for now. Something hung in the balance: geography, or something more serious, interiority; and it was now up to me to get one or the other back to scale.

## CIT SAÜT

From here, rather than take Vlosser, which runs through the city like a vein, though it has no outlets, no left or right turns for kilometres, just passing through the diplomatic houses and offices, the former palaces, the museums and leather shops, along where the river used to flow, where you could sit with someone and count boats; rather than return to ciut centali, from which I could go to cit Mohaly or the Skulbürg, I sit down on the great wall that faces the National Library. I have never been so at the end of everything. Yet, it was the perfect time for me to go back to Triti: I had her beloved folded up in my bag and she would want to unfold him—once I'd vacated the premises—and get point by point the details of his recent journeys. She would not like me to

say "beloved" but I don't know what else you call a person you listen to with such intensity, whose stories send you into a fury of mapmaking, where you're drawing all over your walls and probably letting your tea grow cold, cup after cup, and probably forgetting to put in your tea orders from all over the world, just to make sure you got the line right moving from Pontifili to Tallinn. I didn't know how else to describe their decade-long entwinement around travel, where the one person never leaves and the other person never stays, but somehow they are always moving together, inscribing countries into their conversations. Hematois would be angry with me when he found himself presented to Triti without first having done the things he needed to do in order to see her for himself, *through* himself: the meals he would have wanted to take in, the haircuts to grow out of, the suits to tailor, the absurd adventures he would have wanted to accumulate, to be able to have the right level of *pareis* with her. But Ravicka's Comptroller had reached a wall inside her walking that seemed to obstruct more than just the questions of *where is no. 96* or *can geoscography keep up with the mercuriality of Rah's buildings*; the wall also blanketed *how to walk forth, where to eat, how to*

*greet Duder Bello, who approaches the spot where I'm standing, what to do with these rocks in my pocket.* And left me immobile, even though my friend was on hand. He was in my pocket, but had worn himself out so thoroughly, had taken me so far from where I needed to be to do my work, to maintain control over my routes (I would have to back the recorder up at least fourteen days to figure out where I was and where next I needed to go; I couldn't continue my task from here. I'd have to start over). So I sent a message to Triti and asked her to meet me on this hill, at the National Library, in the north atrium, through the auxiliary caves, past the reading rooms, up into the tower of portraits, on the bridge there that looks out over all those faces: her face and my face among them. Luswage Amini's face. And first I would talk to her about everything that happened, particularly my return to the strange building and what I thought that meant about the changing topography of the city, then I would hand her her pup.

Certain places, after everything that has happened, never change—people say about libraries, the big ones, the ones that seem to hold all the secrets of a culture,

where the maps have aged beyond legibility and are these incredibly beautiful abstract drawings placed inside frames, that no one ever goes to now for information: you go to have your breath taken away or to learn something about space that's in the color, the ancient inks of that original cartography. This library made me feel out of time: it was too enormous to move. It was almost a city itself. I do not mean to say it does not move at all (it migrates as all the buildings of Ravicka do); rather it doesn't move measurably. It hasn't and I don't think it will in my lifetime. So I can enter this space and feel no obligation to think about it, bear no responsibility for how the floor slants and where the sounds come up from the old city. My face is in its walls. Here, I am an historical figure without having had to die, as is Triti, so what better place for us to meet. There are studies of the early movements deep within the annals of this building, but it would be impossible to travel there alone. I have never understood how to walk through the dense woods that cover the lower floor of the Library, how to navigate those dimly lit spaces and the constant feeling that whomever you might have encountered, who might have been able

to assist you or just keep you company, has just been evacuated (and the sense is that the reasons would not be natural): people say there is a particular tree, which has a compartment that can be opened by Dis Curis of The Halls on certain afternoons of certain months when it is colder outside than inside, and this compartment encloses a switch that opens a path to the elevators, meaning the woods are not even where the annals are located but are simply the obstruction to the annals. When you hear stories about where the ancient studies are buried it doesn't even seem like they're really in the National Library at all: it seems as though something can be placed so far away that it actually comes to exist somewhere else. Who draws the boundaries between places? Is this a job that once existed but no longer exists? Because I can think of many reasons to revamp the position. I have already written the first sentence of that new pamphlet in my mind, just standing here, waiting for Triti. We need these first theories on space; we need to invest more time in learning from Old Ravicka, trying to breach its walls again. They say Dis Curis has the key, but she is a person who always seems to be passing by at the edge of sight. I once saw her at the opera hall;

I think she used to cross the bridge between cit Sahaly and cit Mohaly for sport. But, she is one of those characters, like Ana Patova, that you read about more than you see. Is no. 96 just someplace else, some place where a boundary has broken?

My friends were coming. Triti making the trek from outside, taking the loops and tunnels I hoped, as only a Comptroller or a former could, and Hematois soon to emerge from my purse with the first lines of a new novel of his experience, which, I admit, will grab her attention many pages before mine. It made sense that we would be brought together in the dark, in this tower of portraits lit by tapers, and the three of us would descend the city's chronology—probably each with our own question. And, I hope the research pulls us through the old city. I think it can tell us about where we've been all this time.

Two new pamphlets brimming!

## PART TWO: THE HOUSES

No. 32

I live here, and have done so for at least a decade, and have furnished brightly this spacious top-floor flat of seven rooms, this wall-less, invisible flat, and in all that time, I've gotten up, made coffee, dressed, and walked out the door. To leave an invisible structure is just as difficult as returning to one. I'd like to try and explain what it's like: first, how you leave, and then, how you return. Probably, before all of that, I should describe the events that led to my occupying 32, Bravashbinder, events belonging to an even larger system of events and weather that are so in situ it's hard to gather them. But I do know that if I'm to tell a story about how I live, I'm also to tell about work and sex and how the city breathes, and this requires me to back all the way up to the Barbaras Wall, which long ago used to divide the upper

and lower parts of the city on the east side, or back even further up to the emergence of the old city, unfolding, literally, beneath this one—born both of it and before it—and the new laws of motion it introduced into the science of the land (something always changing beneath you, changes your chemistry, historians now say). No, perhaps I should begin by saying what it means to see or how measurements occur in time, because first you have to let go of the notion that sights enter the eyes, or merely the eyes. I like to travel far out of the city center, stand in some improbable place, and describe the things obstructed from my view. I try to see them even though they are behind me or are blocked by the buildings of ciut centali, cast in shadows by the trees atop cit Ramtala. You see something by calling its name and doing a *pondü* with the body. I go to the dirtiest part of the city, the old dilapidated docks, and I dream of the hafshahs; I see the grasses, and *tij*. I stand against the north-side wall of the National Library and press my face into the grooved concrete of its façade and I write a letter about what people are reading inside. I send the letter to the building and try to erase it from my mind: I don't read, I try to tell myself. Books

don't exist. (I'm lying in the woods that run along the A5 with my face against the moist ground, reading the last book.) Some hum extends from the city, and the walls of every home creak: a single, electrical bend that divides time. Only a third of the residents bear a record of the break, only half of that third had actually heard it, only a third of that half of a third reflected on it, and just a few of these tired, still deeply dreaming souls, a sixteenth of the third of that half of a third, connect this miniscule eruption to those from previous nights and previous residences. I don't see anything in the ground of the forest, but I hear pages turning in the book. The book, these creaks in the walls of houses, the hum of the city, the lines in the asphalt, have backed me up to the forest, my face against the ground. I was trying to tell you what it means to see a city that itself sees, that looks out of its structures toward some imagined place, some activating force. We have a whole science that says the buildings of Ravicka are on the move—the houses, the buildings—and although the science doesn't say it's because the houses see that they move, it's clear that they move because they see. Otherwise, we wouldn't be studying the migration of buildings but

rather the behavior of some further exterior force. For example, if experts believed the migrations were due to wind or erosion, then we'd be looking more deeply at the properties of wind, the effects of erosion; and perhaps some group *is* studying one or the other of those things, because the Balsha winds are strong and erosion occurs wherever there is ground; but when it comes to what sets a house in motion, science seems to look primarily at the subjectivity of houses, not going so far as to say they have psychology but definitely allowing for instinct or bewilderment. Houses have creaked for a long time. Long before the first house got up and walked off, the walls of houses creaked, and not just in Ravicka. Nearly every ghostly tale has something that creaks. Wouldn't it be logical to argue this as the first evidence of buildings seeing? As I said earlier, seeing does not extend foremost from the eyes. I get my face dirty in the forest, but I don't come here when it rains. I don't want any trouble with drowning or suffocating; I want to lie down and see what's happening on my street. Understanding what's happening in the houses that surround my house—noting the schedules people keep, which neighbors commingle, which keep

to themselves, what books they read, whether or not they work, what the clocks on their walls say—helps me to define my own house, to give it shape, to know how to enter it today. To be clear, though, 32, Bravash-binder is not in motion. That is not one of its characteristics. It's not off somewhere touring the city or the outskirts wreaking havoc on stationary structures; despite its invisibility, it is not a mystery. It doesn't go on Brunza's list; people are not talking about it behind closed doors. No. 32 bears the condition of many other houses in Ravicka; it exists on a degree nth parallel to some other house, usually on the opposite side of the city, and, for reasons laid out in *The Book of Regulations*—oblique to a layman like me—that other house relies on the invisibility of these houses in order to exist. But, how do you know the place where you live is invisible, and how did you come to live there? It's not only visitors from far away countries who ask me these questions; some of my friends from the oldest families in Ravicka grow flustered when it comes to the question of Rah's houses, many setting themselves up in the heavier homes (granite walls, deep foundations), hoping to stay grounded. However, I would argue: for any

one house to be in motion every other house must be as well. It would be different were this open country, where miles separated one living structure from another; in that scenario, houses could do whatever they wanted—probably for centuries—before any other house knew about it. And that would be an entirely different science we'd be crafting, having no need to take propinquity into account. However, except for the forest, the grasses, and the outskirts, this is a densely built city; even bodies alter environments when they move through them. And for a long time, we seemed to understand how to read these changes. (We knew how to adjust our thinking when we came upon a protest at the city's center, a crowd of bodies standing in a "u" formation or bodies in a moving, furious cluster, pushing toward a gate or a door, a stage.) There is a *pareis* for throngs; there's a *pareis* for one body sprinting through the train station; a *pareis* for an excited family running up or down steps toward a park or carnival; a *pareis* for a couple in a fight, where one of the two storms away, or where they both storm away but in opposite directions, a *pareis* for when they make up and embrace and stay still for an hour (though stillness is another kind of

movement; it affects the ground, even if not the wind). Most Ravickians are excited when the environment changes. The more awkward the situation one is observing the more elaborate is the response, but also, the more subtle is its performance yet the more public. Many people who seem to be in motion are most likely just in the middle of a response to something else. It's hard to know: somehow the elders didn't account for this. We exist in a society of complex gestures, all running along their own time; we are all interrupting, witnessing, performing simultaneously, and this was much easier to accept and discern when it was believed that all of our movement happened upon an unmoving ground, when it was believed that the ground itself was a dense impaction of dirt and sediment, when we didn't think about the ground. Now as I move along the streets of Ravicka I think how odd it must have been to have this sort of geographic numbness I'm talking about, where your sense of the planet is on one hand a picture of a green and blue sphere rotating in a lonely vast darkness and on the other hand that indisputable flat one-dimensional ground upon which we built our houses or took off in our planes. We have always acted



as if we understood the space between the ground and sky, because this is primarily where we place our bodies, this was our living space, where we could most understand breath and language and light and contour. Someone at some point in our history said it was safe to walk across the ground, to walk without thinking about the ground; we were free to study the sky, to figure out how to build in empty space; birds were our mentors. We laughed at things that burrowed below ground; we left them to the dark. Our understanding of space became implicit, complex, ornate but always extending from the body, which began at our feet or at our crown, and returned to the body. We would have sworn the environment was complete—not quite closed or sealed but unchanging enough that we all had access to the pattern: we shared memory, language; in the depths of our homes we shared our bodies; we touched our breasts to one another, we pulled our limbs through, we drank each other's fluids. Living comprised all these movements, all these collectivities, and while it seemed to be transpiring on top of a silent, crystalized ground, among glued-down props, you could drop your books while you were running for the bus and I could jump

back twice then slowly forward in a somersault and grab a leaf from a tree and a rock from my pocket (hand you the book you neglected to retrieve, the one under the tire of the parked car), and if we walked away from this scene without exchanging names or other means of contact, it would have seemed strange but not conspiratorial. I would have made a small notation later in my notebook and that would have been the day. (But the ground opened or lifted and an ancient city began to carve itself beneath us, talking to our structures, setting them in motion—a city most of us can't reach. I have never seen the door, which awaits the traveler many kilometers underground, nor have I found the vaunted gate at the bottom of the stairs inside Shadow of Courts Park. I have read about these portals in Amini novels; I've seen them drawn and mapped out and passed around at Cartographer's café, but I don't know whether these stories and maps actually lead to the ancient city or whether they merely take one along the elaborate roads and sentences of fiction.)

I can take only so much of the forest floor at this time of year. It's cold out so the ground and walls of struc-

tures take on a brittle quality; you can learn from brittle but you can't see clearly through it. You can't read it and there's not much to eat. When it's cold and the light is low in the forest there are many more voices, and I have to concentrate deeply so to discern my voice from the others, even though my voice emits from my body and I should be able to feel this aspiration occurring. However, I don't feel it because of how low the branches hang and because my body is spread throughout the forest. The narrow paths tear you to pieces; the way light cuts through space. Everything is splintered; everything is an echo. Your movements begin to repeat those of invisible animals scurrying through the thick. I avoid the thick but because I am participating in the environment my body takes on qualities of animals in the thick. I walk mindful of the small stone house nestled in the heart of these woods; the house watches me as I approach and make detours to by-pass it. All of us forest animals work diligently to make space and leave space for one another. I am here to see. I know many of the other animals are here because they were born here; they spend the day in search of food; when it's cold they sleep, and dig themselves into the ground, they make a

pile of leaves and sticks and feathers (I think this is what we're hearing—the making of piles). But, I don't know why the house is here. And I especially don't want to see what it sees. To be clear: unlike the animals and the stone house of this forest, I don't live here. I inhabit 32, Bravashbinder, which is a house situated in cit Mohaly (receiving the light of cit Sahaly), gazing into the attic of cit Zahim, and this is a house in direct parallel to another house on the west side of the city. My house exists and has walls but is also invisible. I wanted to tell you how I came to live here, so I went out to the outskirts in order to see. I wanted to make clear what is meant by the word *invisible*, what is meant when someone says being unseen does not make you a ghost, particularly when you're a house. It is also important to understand who would be saying this and why and to whom the person would be brave enough to speak. Not that there is a government conspiracy to defend myself against: there is little danger in that (I mean there might be a government conspiracy but there is nothing the elders could concoct that would stand up to this conspiracy of architecture—though the architects pretend to be just as confounded as everyone else that the build-

ings move and that a city grows beneath us, grows without itself needing to be constructed, grows as if it's a memory returning to a body, intact and aged). I wanted to be an opera singer. I wanted to sing in the great cathedrals of Poland. Later, I wanted to be an artist. I wanted to draw lines across a large surface, then scratch away those lines, then redraw them, then scratch them away again, and do this with my eyes closed or in low northern light, until someone said, Time's up. The opening is tomorrow. I wanted to sing and I wanted to draw, so I moved to cit Mohaly, as every other creative person does. You go there or you go to cit Sahaly—to Sahaly if you're looking to practice art at the level of science, if you want to be an architect, for example, or a cartographer. I wanted to draw; I wanted to carve lines with my voice; I wanted to gather all the breath in my body and bifurcate an audience. When I entered cit Mohaly at the age of 17 it was as if crossing into another country. I grew up not far from this neighborhood. In fact, I visited it often as a kid. So it was not as though I didn't know where I was. I knew the cafés; I knew the modern museum. My parents had long-time friends that lived at 1821, Keliasburg, next to one of the

best bookstores in the city. Cit Mohaly was not unknown to me and yet, when I made my crossing, in company of my childhood friend Sirin Cucek, when I passed through the fog of the Fallen River River Bridge and exited into the bright yellow of Mohaly, I felt as though I'd surfaced in an unknown land. I'm trying to tell you why. The buildings were already in motion at this point. You had not yet begun studying geoscography as a subject in school but every reading person was aware of it, rather every active person. Anyone moving about outside—even if it was just to buy a loaf of bread or refill the olive oil, even if it was just to collect leaves for pressing—would soon enough realize herself on some living ground. You weren't in an action movie: the street didn't rise up and fling itself, crashing down upon other streets, destroying buildings and homes, with you, clutching for life to some rebar, hanging over a void. Time pulled the event apart. The earth moving, the buildings putting themselves in transit was like the slowing down of everything. The days were a year long. Time was a machination of the earth turning and the buildings of Ravicka trying to do something that no other country was reported to have done; the city was a

novel in progress. And everyone knew this. We spoke jokingly of ourselves as "Novelians"; the banter gave us space. As long as the change was creative, was about some thinking mind going after new shapes, we reasoned, our bodies were safe. The city wouldn't try to destroy our bodies; it needed us. It needed our habitation. It was amazing to imagine your city was a novel, and that for you to walk around within it meant that you were in language, you were in a thinking text; pages were walls that enclosed you, the ground was the floor of the book, the horizon of the sentence, and all you were doing was walking up hill, going for coffee, hanging clothes to dry. We were inside a living structure, ourselves living, and went on this way for a long time. Long before I was born the Novelians were weaving tales about the extended night, where houses stood up and walked off, and radiant dawns spent combing through neighborhoods: "Have you seen the Volta? Is the Gálaledon in ciut centali this morning?" The elders added an hour to the workday. So I was born into this wandering. Although it didn't become my own until I was an adult. Growing up, I saw the city as a strange, unknown body that seemed to be in conversation with

its inhabitants and seemed to believe direct communication was possible. We didn't understand what it wanted to say so when we moved around looking for our lost sites or we built new sites in vacated spaces the city took this as a response. We'd walk a new way to work or coffee or to dinner with a friend and by the next morning the city would have responded, would have moved something. And I say *moved* to encapsulate all kinds of change. I'm saying the city *responded*, the city *communicated*, but these are not the right words. We tried to go on with our living in spite of everything changing around us; we tried to complete the simple tasks: just get up, go to work, run along the river, attend a reading, go to Dis Navarti's opening, have a drink with someone, maybe bring her home, go to sleep, wake again; we tried to make these motions of living automatic, inherent to time, thus occurring regardless of what the buildings did or of where you were with the massively slow shifting of our infrastructure. This was not a response but the buildings read it as such. The buildings expected something else. If I've got the story right and if those who handed the story down to me got it right, the story, which feels a little flimsy,

like it fell out of a book or was dug out of the ground, if we were to allow this to be the true story of what happened when the ground opened and the city beneath us grew and the buildings of the above city began to stand up and stretch and move around, the story said our ancestors moved about "in a wind," with their ears plugged, and music was at its most engaging then. They walked and music carried them, and everything else—the draining waters, the quiet war, structures migrating—was like light flickering on the wall, the disco's strobe light. You didn't have to understand the light, just move to it, just keep a rhythm that someone else could match, use the rhythm to build a language and keep from the core of that language anything the language couldn't understand. This is the speaking language I'm talking about, which is radically different from the written one.

So, when I made my crossing into cit Mohaly those many years ago, I was already accustomed to the buildings, accustomed to the story of their changing and had had some bodily experience of their change as well, although not directly (it was more through someone

else's body that I could touch the details). Nevertheless, when I crossed, it was as if an aspect of the neighborhood split off at once, not disappearing as you might hope or expect, leaving you with the familiar and perhaps a story of some strange sensation of space hovering or eluded or shut away. Rather, the cit Mohaly I had known was the one that fled and what stayed behind seemed newer than I was. It was the architecture of the buildings—it was the façade of the buildings, their windows: some flickering of light on the glass, some flickering of light *above* the glass, above the houses that drew my attention. I couldn't put my finger on it but immediately upon stepping onto Legostrod Street from the bridge I saw reflections of light where light shouldn't be, where it couldn't be because there was no wall, no surface there to send the light back toward the sun: the light should have gone through, hit the houses on Baysvitter. Instead, the light appeared as a presence floating above some of the buildings, above many of the buildings I passed as I tried to find my new home. The light didn't feel like a haunting; it didn't remind me of people, neither was it reminiscent of place. If anything it was as if clouds had fallen from the sky, clouds shot

through with light, broke up by some enormity, something electric and powerful. I'd never seen these floating light bodies anywhere in Ravicka before, and it wasn't easy explaining what I saw to Sirin. As I said she'd made her crossing the previous year and the Mohaly she knew before she crossed the bridge remained. This was a story you might have read in a Luswage Amini novel, where someone is searching for "the composers," that brigade of walkers who set out before everyone else does, carving lines into the ground, the roads of our future maps. But a person searches them out to reveal a mistake having been made, a whole country missed, a hidden geography. Yet, the seeker can't find the composers, so the composers go on mapping already-mapped terrain and, in the space of the novel—Amini's masterpiece *Matlatli Doc*—never encounter that undiscovered country, which, we are encouraged to believe, is Old Ravicka, in nascence. I was walking along the street, though, and this was supposed to be reality. People say you can never be quite certain that you're not in a novel, and if, while you are in this uncertain place something strange happens, you should begin your own novel. I went to Mohaly to draw and to

sing. I was not invested in description. I cared about time as duration, all the breath I could get in a bar, but I was indifferent to its increments. Of course, I knew there was A, then B, and it was impossible not to simply follow these rules as you made your life as a young artist, as anything in fact. The streets made us orderly, the sun did, even clouds. Our hunger put us in time. Our desire for sex. Wanting to know what was down that alley. And you knew it was all broken up into steps and micro-events. But in the first days my wandering was interrupted by a grouping of light bodies that seemed to be making scaffolding in the sky, in the space between the tops of buildings and sky, above the roofs of houses, and I studied closely to see whether other people were aware of this silent construction. It was hard to tell. I performed the wondering *pareis* when I was in the vicinity of these architectures. Passersby would suggest I read Patova's *I Thought of Architecture*, which I had read many times and knew many passages by heart, as most everyone else did. It was because I was performing the wondering *pareis* without the appropriate speaking words that my gestures came across as entreaty, as if to demand, "Help me see better or live bet-

ter," and since I was standing so close to the outer walls of buildings, people assumed I was speaking in reference to them, the buildings. Dis Patova's *Architecture* is a poetics of habitation. The language of the text tries to emulate the experience of passing through thresholds; for a long time after reading it you are very conscious of the transom of a door, of the past you leave and the unknown that waits for you. Patova suggests the awareness shapes the space of a building such that every building presents a different architecture to each inhabitant, even if those inhabitants are walking together down a corridor, as Sirin and I were when she helped me register at the Art House, where I would study for the next many years (first singing, then drawing). I would study there and then later teach there. And it's true I did use what I knew of Patova's *Architecture* to make sense of the spectral structures I encountered in cit Mohaly (but then began to see all over the city, in ciut centali, in cit Suat, even in Dehal, where I grew up) but I was holding this very difficult posture, which made my limbs tremble, because I needed recognition. There had to be a secret society of people working on this invisible architecture. How could there not be?

There were phantom structures being built on top of and in between . . . what would you call them? *Real* structures, *concrete* structures? There had to be a cohort taking measure of these entities, tracking them across the city, reading them against the ancient texts, but no one approached me, other than to suggest Ana Patova. Was Ana Patova the gesture I was looking for? I would come to ask. And so I had no choice but to relearn the book, to dismantle everything I believed about it and search out new choreographies. I looked for a new kind of body that slipped by the things everyone else slowed for then sort of vanished through a crack or while climbing up a set of stairs. I began moving about the city reciting those beloved opening words but doing so uncustomarily, shifting intonation to say "city effects" softly and trumpeting loudly through the usually quiet, "We cleave, we edge." I varied where I let the words land as I walked the streets of cit Mohaly, still alone but twinning the light bodies above me, taking on their light qualities, seeming myself to glow from inside, to be breaking apart as I spoke, as I sang from my core, and breathed and learned to stretch my voice without harming my throat, and you could put your

hand through me as easily as I could let the words *her houses opened inside buildings fitted for commerce* fall at the corners of Skolas and Birinijiu, and then along the Kreij underpass the next day, back on Skolas the following day, sometimes both sites in one day, sometimes entirely different sites. And sometimes I saw Ana Patova herself walking these same streets, though not reciting the words of her books (or anyone else's books for that matter) as I was constantly in the habit of doing my first years as a student in cit Mohaly, and it wasn't extraordinary that I would see her: this was Ravicka, you saw everybody and you knew everyone, because at some point or another you would have heard the stories about the grasses and whose family sat next to whom, (which in the end was everyone's family, because we all wanted culture and wanted to build a language we could keep handing around like something warm to stick your cold hands through.) I saw Ana Patova and gave *tij* but I never asked her whether she saw what I was seeing. It would have been rude and impossible. It would have been impossible to point, to describe; it would be unconscionable to bend and flip your body and speak aloud about the

translucent lines, the glowing floors suspended in the air. I could have written a novel about it, added my novel to the pile, but I hadn't moved to cit Mohaly to write. I wanted to sing. I wanted to draw. I wanted lines to extend from my throat, the back end of a long-held note, multiple lines escaping me, and moving outward, along circuits of people's spent breath, and to see this somehow: the voice drawn outside the body, making thin, barely readable tunnels across space and between bodies and buildings, all that empty space full of last week's breathing.

But, as I went on living, my desire for lines changed. I could only grasp a sense of the exterior when I took myself out of context; I couldn't think about something at the same time that I stood within its vicinity. This was because the fabric of perception had grown very thin. It was no longer that I was one among a few who could see the invisible structures erupting all over the city; it was no longer that some structures were invisible and some were concrete: I could not discern between them anymore. And it was strange that the porosity of these forms (that I could enter the one and exit the other)



was just another thing I did with my day as I became an adult. There were so many portals that I began to believe I was invisible, because isn't it ghosts who are said to walk through walls. No one had said walls were permeable. You could pull your body through sentences, but these would be sentences that everyone had access to, everyone standing in that conversation. But I occupied a city that seemed happy to exist only for me. I knew I wasn't alone but I couldn't find the others. Why wouldn't I be crossing an impossible threshold at the same time someone else was? It occurred to me that something in the conditions of our seeing made us undetectable to one another, perhaps not even occupying the same concept of time. Perhaps to see was to divide time into even more slender fragments than those to which we were accustomed. Rather than make time something that was both accumulated and sliced, this time was sliced and sent off separately from every other time. So, we were all neighboring each other's crossings and each other's sightings of translucent, burgeoning structures, but each making a house out of that moment of seeing. I'm saying perhaps it was our moments of seeing that were the invisible structures in the first

place. And so I wasn't alone in this strangeness, yet because I was privy to it I had to be on my own; it seemed there needed to be witnesses to time as much as there needed to be actors in time. Though, I was not held out of time either. My days accumulated like everyone else's did. I paid rent and eventually a mortgage; I accumulated lovers and books (before books began to confuse me); I grew older; I took walks into the hills; I visited other countries and picked up elaborately constructed foreign words that provided further places to explore. I was Ravickian. I was of the museum generation. I had just made my crossing and was going to be an opera singer. The day was passing, and decades, and it was growing dark; there had to be a place to put my things, a window I could open, from which I could look out over the dense city or just onto a park or a quiet street. I didn't want to live on the University grounds; I was always too old for that.

One day in the midst of everything I realized I was seeing it, too. Among all the invisible things that cluttered my view of the city, there was something I saw that turned out *not* to be invisible. Although for a long time, I had been treating it as if it were. As I said, it was not always easy to discern the concrete from the ephemeral, since it turned out that ephemeral structures were as open to habitation as the stable ones we'd set our lives to. It wasn't like we were constantly reminding ourselves that structures were real. I watch people; they don't go around knocking on walls. Sure, you walk through doors and relax your body because you're now inside, or you bundle up to protect your body from the elements when you're outside. Yes, there is sometimes a shift in temperature,

but it's not consistent. Sometimes you think you're outside because it's warm and the light is bright and people pass you by, some calling your name, but then you cross over a threshold and you find you're somewhere that's even warmer and brighter, and there are no people. We lose track of the volumes, what separates one space from another (what counts as an interior space and an exterior space); we forget what to do with our curtains. But, something strange happened to my life, in the decades after my crossing. It was as if I had to make up for years, for generations, of people not seeing what was not there. As I made my way, it began to seem that there were more invisible structures than there were structures built into the ground, and this complicated my understanding and my response to the actual migration of buildings. The hard buildings, as I began to call them, were on the move. You grew up knowing this. It was a line in every novel. In every novel you read, someone was tracking some structure across the neighborhoods or up the mountain. The novels were like many hundreds of streams feeding back into the sea, and the sea was the accumulation of all our schooling, all our conversations at dinner—

Actually, I have to re-think what I've said. It's not that I realized I was seeing a structure that should not have been seen, at least by me, as my earlier confession seems to suggest. It's that, at some point, it became clear to me the way I was seeing this hard structure was different from the way I saw other hard structures, and that's why it stood out to me. The hard structures weren't see-through, which was how you knew they weren't invisible; they didn't have a rim of light surrounding them; they didn't hover above other buildings without stairs or escalators. The hard buildings were reliable in their materiality. You knew you could only enter them through doors. You needed light fixtures in order to see. You needed walls to hold up the above floors. Even though these buildings moved, when you located them, they required the same well-worn acts for entry. Something had to be pushed or pulled. It was my awareness of light that allowed me to move through these distinct worlds—that of the hard and that of the invisible—without standing out too much. But, what I'm saying is that it began to be clear to me that some hard buildings were embodying a material state that was neither exclusively hard nor invisible. It's not easy to explain.

These were the categories I had to negotiate: there were the exclusively hard buildings that were migrating; there were the invisible buildings, which mostly stayed where they were (though obviously changing their architecture depending on which hard buildings were laid against them); and newly added was this mutant strand of building that wavered between visibility and invisibility. How did I know it wavered if I saw it when it was both visible and not? Again, because when it was visible the lines that determined its boundaries were not luminous.

I spent many years trying to understand to what sort of category I belonged. Was I visible? Did I migrate? Could I be of some use to the city? We all saw the migrations but we did not all see the invisibility. I had the fortune of seeing things that weren't there, but this was not a functional gift: it bore no real consequences. If I understood the relationship between the hard and translucent structures, then, at least, I could make live maps of our living. People would swing by my house each morning (though, perhaps a newsstand in ciut centali would be more accessible) and I'd be able to provide them with

in-time, personalized charts and grids for their day. Alternatively, were the fact of my gift relevant, I could obtain a position on the city council that would be instrumental in developing new *pareis* for passing the body through limbic architectures. However, I was just a kind of neighborhood watch. I had wanted to be a singer and then an artist. I'd completed my studies and found that I was neither singing nor drawing for income. I had begun taking my walks to the forest, and years were going by. There was a creek in the forest that sounded like rain; large rocks surrounded the creek and the creek was a kind of drop-off, below the forest floor. You'd sit on the rocks to look down over the water, and at certain times of the day the surface of the water would reflect images of your thinking. Shapes would emerge from my seeing, shapes resembling structures for living: large squares sitting on top of rectangles, rectangles cut through with lines, tiny squares in a stack towering but lying flat on the water. The day was a set of contradictions that needed to be organized. The buildings in the water were the same numbered buildings on the street, but the water held them as propositions: what if this building were placed next to that one? Trying to get at

a deeper math: a notion of thinness, where boundaries were constantly in flux. As with everything, these calculations were not in conversations with the buildings' migrations. This was not the living map I wished to sell. This was just another thing I wasn't supposed to see and had no real way into. You began to feel like you were the page of a book and novels were being written and erased on you all day.

To get to the forest I had to walk through the city. But, in order to walk through the city I had to make sense of what I was seeing—not only in cit Mohaly but also in every other major district in Ravicka, where some spectral shape seemed bent on communicating with me. (I had been placed inside of something dreaming—this country dreaming, its citizens dreaming, the novels we had all written dreaming (though I hadn't written any novels yet). Some mind wanted to grow a city on top of this one, even though there was another, an ancient one, growing beneath us.) It was as if it were impossible for a space to be singular, for there to be a single entity per space. We didn't grow up thinking this. Every body had a piece of the floor, some part of the wall to lean on. The

elders never tried to get us to bunch up (except when we were eating); there was always a thing and then a space and then another thing, and this could be a body or a table or a book. The way we treated our walls was to hang something, move over some centimeters then hang something else. You wanted borders; you wanted to see the white space. To see the city I had to walk out of it; it was too noisy and too crowded to grasp it from within. The forest was for the city. Invisibility was a part of how the city knew itself, yet the forest knew nothing about invisibility. The forest just allowed you to see whatever there was to see and didn't make distinctions and probably provided this theatre only for me, giving to other visitors in other parts of the wood something else entirely. Perhaps some burning revelation about doors: the doors of Ravicka. I sang in a theatre once; I sang vespers and wore a long dress that was like paper and ornamented by glittering concentric circles. I debuted then I departed that career. Something had gotten into my head. I wanted to be more involved in space and I couldn't do this with my voice. I began to draw on large sheets of paper memories of my singing. Although the voice couldn't carve space or make space

or chart space in any way that encouraged me to pursue a career in it, when you drew what the voice did you found a plentitude of remnants: fragments of our living, tiny novels, small fires.

I was drawing when it dawned on me that I was bringing things into the light that would have preferred to stay unseen, undefined. You risked the invisible architectures by occupying them; you force them to act outside of themselves. Yet, this is what they asked of you. They wanted a conversation, although not so much with the human body as with the bodies of the hard buildings, but they needed our bodies to build the tension. We were like poetic lines being woven into prose.

The nature of the structures was changing over time, and this was something I captured in my drawings, though it was not something you held up next to a structure to measure its change—there would be no resemblance between them. Rather, the drawings were records of my reactions to altered space: how my mind responded to prolonged breathing, how I built rooms, how I found the buildings I needed that were not where

they last were, the deep grooves in space the migrations created. On paper, these traces took unfamiliar shapes; they seemed to be maths stretched out, numbers pulled until they became abstractions of themselves, a 3 pulled across a room, a city, a y= torn apart. But the drawings also looked as though someone had placed an oily jar on top of a thin sheet of paper, picked it up, put it down, placing it just off of where it had been, such that the surface of the paper was covered in oily half-shapes of returns, which was how I came to believe buildings saw one another. I drew inside no. 32 because it was my home and it was ephemeral. The sheets were large and textured. I drew on the edge of space, where the floor ended and the city began (though the city ran through the whole house, it had no reason to divert itself). I was aging as I drew. I took a lover and visited other parts of the city. I began to eat at a restaurant across the bridge, where a certain kind of artist and entrepreneur met: an artist who made paper, an entrepreneur who sold paper to artists. I belonged to neither group but was folded in. I was making these drawings that seemed to say I understood something about the buildings that others were combing novels to understand. I didn't draw to

explain. I drew to find what was left behind. Time was being shredded across the landscape. The buildings had arranged themselves such that they all refracted the sun's light at the same time. I could no longer see where I was living; everything was too close and too silent and fragmenting from my feet to the end of space. I'd never given much thought to the forest. The city and its grassy outskirts were too consuming. There was another city growing beneath us. It rumbled beneath you. It seemed to sleep all summer. But, I'm cramming too much into this explanation about how certain of our buildings were evolving ahead of our ability to track or comprehend their progress, and how I seemed to be living in the middle of these mutations and was probably myself mutating, but again in a way that had yet to be grasped in our writing. I lived in no. 32 Bravashbinder and could see across the city to its corresponding house, no. 96; I watched the hard building from my ephemeral one and began to move toward it, although, technically, this was not encouraged—because what would it mean for our numbers were we to walk directly from something unmapable to something mapable?

First, I left my invisible structure and then I walked. No, first I breathed to descend my structure and then I set out to walk. My immediate neighbors did not seem to notice that my living differed from theirs in that my flat of rooms existed in a geometric impossibility. My rooms opened and closed depending on how air moved through my body, and their rooms did not open and close. For a long time, before I understood my breath, I was stuck in one strange light-filled room. I could have rented something tangible, a more permanent, expanded home, but ever since I crossed into cit Mohaly I'd felt I was a part of some order of seers that required me to live among these specters. I'd thought they were dreams or memories from other countries or dimensions. I'd thought these were buildings that didn't make it, that had been destroyed by fire or bombed in war. Someone had to attend to them, but they seemed to want nothing more than other buildings wanted—in fact, probably less, because these buildings weren't bent on migrating. They hovered; they were luminous, and simply seemed to reveal the soul of living, a body moving through rooms, alone or with others, sitting, eating, bathing,

doing some form of work that brought on sleep or a desire for food or company. However, the place in which I live should not be confused with those modern homes whose walls are constructed of ceiling-to-floor windows; those are hard buildings with see-through walls, usually nestled in the woods or on a cliff, never set among other buildings, not on a busy street. The walls of my flat are not material and yet they make a definite shape; it's the light that provides the structure, and though the walls are not hard you don't fall out of them. You don't go near them, actually. When I'm at home, everywhere I stand is the center space, a space surrounded by objects, and no matter how far I walk in one direction, the room comes and settles itself around me, until I breathe and am in another room, the room for sleeping, the room where I draw. And, although I can only see one room at a time, I know the other rooms exist, in that they have features that differ from those of the other rooms; not every room has a long wooden table, not every room has a bed. Living was like writing a long, immersive essay: inside something fluid and labyrinthine, where light shined in at odd angles, even during the new moon. Sleeping was

a terrifying pause in writing. Walking was writing. Each room held an essay you wrote as you breathed and the subject of the essay usually had nothing to do with the function of the room, but maybe the room's architecture, for that day, was shaped by the quality of your thinking. First, I breathed the steps to my house, and then I descended them. Most of the time my destination was "the coordinate," the hard building that sat along the degree nth parallel to my home. I had never really intended to visit the forest. It was just always where I ended up.

Seeing my coordinate for the first time and knowing it was my coordinate was like being in two separate novels—at the beginning of one, at the end of the other—and having those two novels write toward one another but as if with an obstacle between them, such as a massive eruption in the landscape that you must walk around in order to progress, and it'll take decades to do this. And, in that time, events break in your living—people get frightened, start fleeing the city; the city starts dreaming itself dry and everyone grows lonely (those who stay)—but everyone starts to

do a kind of writing that mimics how the houses migrate—slowly, unpredictably—and those of us writing seem to lose control of our work. Such that no one actually knows if there is a city growing beneath us or if this is some complexity born out of reading. But, my coordinate was real. And I saw what it did. For so long, I tried to get a closer look. I left my house; I walked toward it. I circled my autobiography. Yet, the more I walked the further the house seemed and the darker the forest, dense with ferns and moss and rolling terrain, as if the forest hid some other landscape soon to be burgeoning. I was fixated on the coordinate because I couldn't reach it, because I could see it but couldn't reach it but others could reach it, could stand right in front with their clipboards and frag machines but acted as though they couldn't see it. You are used to contradictions in Ravicka; you just hope to get the ones that allow you to go on making a life doing whatever it is you do. But the houses have changed everybody's living. It's possible that all of us are out on some trek trying to find the thing we see but can't reach, or forever reaching the thing we see but again and again finding we don't know what to do



with it or what to say about it. And you're still passing each other, exchanging novels, trying to find the right reader for your words. You're still putting your hands inside someone and opening to someone's hands, hoping you might lead each other to new places, to places further inside the place you've already been.

## AFTERWORD: THE STORY OF A NOVEL

When I began *Houses of Ravicka* in spring or summer 2008 I had intended it to be the third book in the Ravicka series. Although *Event Factory* and *The Ravickians* were published in 2010 and 2011, respectively, I'd written them many years before: *Event Factory* in 2003 and *The Ravickians* in 2005. For years, they were in a stack. It was a strange time. My writing was changing; this invented city was growing; its language and customs were evolving, but without witnesses. The growing stack made me anxious, but never enough to impede my progress. Ironically, the thing that would eventually stall my production was fiction itself.

In 2008, I began *Houses* and wrote into it for maybe a year until I hit a wall. In the novel, I'd begun to tell a story about Ravicka's Comptroller, whose job was to take geoscogs of the city's buildings and houses; these are measurements that keep track of a building's subtle changes and movements over time; it also was used to support topographical alignment between any building and its invisible counterpart, which typically existed in another part of the city. In this instance, the Comptroller is looking to make a geoscog of house no. 96 in the Skülburg and its cousin no. 32 in cit Mohaly. For the first two chapters, I wrote joyously, inventing a new science, meeting new characters (including my first Basharac), becoming familiar with areas of Ravicka that either I'd never visited before or I'd had no reason to describe. In the next chapters, I allowed myself to get caught up, in a literal sense, in the streets and architecture of the city, asking questions about the relationship of narrative and space (how one goes about describing where one is and what one is doing) in a context where space is not reliable. And then I hit that wall. There was a mystery. No. 96 was not where it was supposed to be, thus we couldn't be sure that no. 32 was

where it wasn't appropriately. I found the predicament intoxicating as a thinker and traveler, and for a while (because this was the first time I'd been in such an obvious situation of plot) I waited for something to happen . . . in the writing, in Jakobi's walking, while I slept. I assumed like any other time I'd been writing, that the way to go would come naturally to me. It would reveal itself somewhere between sentences, would be a click I might not even notice, a slight shift that sent me on my way. This was not what happened. Instead there came a realization that what was required to move forward in this novel was (to put it awkwardly) fiction, a kind of stepping away to make something up then bringing it back to language.

As I describe in an essay from a recent collection, *Calamities*, an essay that attempts to come to terms with the "infinity" of the revision of *Houses*, this was a real frustration: why couldn't I, in fiction, discover the location of the missing house in the same manner as the reader might? The essay declares then inquires: "I didn't know where [the houses] were, either, why did I have to act as though I did?" It may sound petulant, but it was

a deeply pressing and clearly paralyzing question. If it were fiction to want to solve this problem, then what was it I wanted to do?

The wall held for the next four years, until a small opening formed, making way for Hematois, whom I love but who seems to only add confusion to Jakobi's trajectory. I wrote through their encounter until I got stuck, again. There was still the problem of the houses. Another two years went by: I wrote *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge* and placed it before *Houses* in the series. I wrote a short novel, *Morelia*. I wrote *Calamities*. I made hundreds of drawings. I even started another Ravicka novel, this one about the grasses. During all this non-*Houses* writing, even when drawing, I regarded the novel as a layering of multiple concepts of space within a 120-page expanse; these spaces took shape as time, topography, tones of feeling, signals for events, figures crossing, and were like folds convulsing simultaneously through language. To write was to wander through these folds, to try to see space as each of these things, always shifting, undoing, and to make the texts I built through this seeing vibrate.

So, what was it about this one book that it wouldn't move and that I couldn't move inside it?

In 2015 I was still asking the same question: how did I get here, in the middle of a novel where there was a problem that needed to be solved, where the narrator's forward progress through the novel seemed to necessitate a solution: if he keeps walking he'll find it, if he keeps re-doing the science, he'll find it. And what held the finish away was that same burning refusal to know where the missing house was, to know it *somehow some way* prior to Jakobi himself knowing. Because, in fact, I *was* Jakobi, which meant (for me) I could no more write an entire book exclusively in the body and voice of a male character (hence his flickering gender identity) than I could step outside of him, solve the problem of the missing house, then get reabsorbed into him to now tell the story of his solving the problem.

I wanted to stay in the space of discovery, for *Houses* to be a record, a kind of organization of my movement across those folds of space. I wanted to be able to show the reader what I encountered as a subject writing inside

another subject, to argue the novel as a study of experience, a study of time and tones and topographies that one conducts from positions of not knowing or of wonder. I wanted the story, its conclusion to be one I meet rather than one I previously knew.

When I returned to the book in 2015, my relationship to architecture had changed utterly. I was closer to it conceptually than I'd ever been before (having moved through *Ana Patova*, which treats the writing of books as an inhabitable architecture, and *Prose Architectures*, a series of over 300 drawn writings, which treats the paragraph as an architecture of moving lines). I believe it was this shift in attention, this sort of expansion of technical skill or at least technical practice—drawing building after building into fields of writing—that produced a new sustained opening for the book. I had something now that I didn't have seven years prior when I began the novel: a way into houses. For most of the fall of 2015, I wrote Part Two of the book. If it's possible to say this, I wrote with a kind of vision that made everything in me go still. I was saying the thing that I had long wanted to say. On one level, this *thing* was about architecture—I'd

finally been able to get past the sort of chant of “architecture, architecture” that had permeated recent work and I was now saying something about it that allowed me inside structures, no longer running my hand along the exteriors or standing outside looking up at the verticality of them but inside now, occupying space that is not visible from the other side of the wall: a new, secret world of objects and spatial relation of which I have so much more to say and learn.

But the revelation of Part Two was not only about finding entry into architecture and developing notions for composing interior space; it was, on a profound level, a level on which one survives the atrocities of the political and social present, a way for me to put a pin in the map as to where I am in the world. It was only a couple of weeks ago in January 2017, as I was finishing *Houses*, adding the last chapter of Part One, where Jakobi waits for Triti in the tower of portraits within the labyrinth of the National Library with Hematois folded up in her bag, that I understood where house no. 96 was. It is where I am, where many of us probably feel that we are: somewhere where the boundary between places

has broken. The reason this is not an annihilating recognition is because the place where the boundary has broken is also a place of refracting light, of impossible angles, of beautiful breathing presences gathering, of music becoming language becoming lines becoming dance, the dance of the angles and light of spaces, and all of this changing all the time that there is too much to say about it, too much to see to want to stop seeing.

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And always, everything, Danielle Vogel.

DOROTHY, A PUBLISHING PROJECT

1. Renee Gladman *Event Factory*
2. Barbara Comyns *Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead*
3. Renee Gladman *The Ravickians*
4. Manuela Draeger *In the Time of the Blue Ball*
5. Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi *Fra Keeler*
6. Suzanne Scanlon *Promising Young Women*
7. Renee Gladman *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*
8. Amina Cain *Creature*
9. Joanna Ruocco *Dan*
10. Nell Zink *The Wallcreeper*
11. Marianne Fritz *The Weight of Things*
12. Joanna Walsh *Vertigo*
13. Nathalie Léger *Suite for Barbara Loden*
14. Jen George *The Babysitter at Rest*
15. Leonora Carrington *The Complete Stories*
16. Renee Gladman *Houses of Ravicka*

RAVICKA'S CONTROLLER, author of *Calculations*, seems to have lost a house. It is, though an invisible house on the far side of town, which corresponds to the missing house, remains appropriately invisible. Inside the invisible house, a nameless Ravickian considers how she came to the life she is living, and investigates the deep history of Ravicka—that mysterious city-country born of Renee Gladman's philosophical, funny, audacious, extraordinary imagination.

RENEE GLADMAN is the author of ten books, most recently *Prose Architectures*, a monograph of drawings. She lives in New England with poet-ceremonialist Danielle Vogel.



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